



**COMPETING FOR TOMORROW**  
A POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND SKILLS SUMMIT

**DISCUSSION GUIDE:**  
The Future of Postsecondary Education  
and Skills Training in Canada

**FEBRUARY 2006**



Prepared For:  
Participants in the Stakeholder Summit on Postsecondary Education and Skills Training

Prepared By:  
The governments of Ontario and Quebec in support of the Council of the Federation

For more information on the stakeholder summit, please see the Competing for Tomorrow website at:  
[www.competingfortomorrow.ca](http://www.competingfortomorrow.ca)

**WELCOME MESSAGE  
FROM PREMIER MCGUINTY AND PREMIER CHAREST**

Dear Summit Participant,

On behalf of the Council of the Federation (COF), we would like to welcome you to *Competing for Tomorrow: A Postsecondary Education and Skills Summit*. We are delighted that you have agreed to participate in this significant event.

Competing for Tomorrow aims to strengthen the knowledge and skills of Canadians, to enable all of us and our country to thrive in the 21st century. Equipping Canadians with the education and skills they need to reach their full potential is imperative for all governments in Canada.

The COF recognizes the need for action and has made enhancing Canadian postsecondary education and skills training systems one of its main priorities. At its 2005 summer meeting in Banff, the COF renewed its commitment to ensuring that provincial-territorial training and postsecondary education systems are capable of keeping Canada competitive in the global economy.

By participating in the summit, you will have an opportunity to bring your experience and leadership to the development of a path forward in postsecondary education and skills training. Your ideas will help the COF form its vision for a strategy in this vital area, a plan that will reflect our country's regional diversity.

Like you, the other stakeholders present—ranging from students to university and college presidents, workers to employers, community-based learning groups to those facing barriers to labour force participation—have a clear sense of the existing challenges and potential solutions. We encourage you to join the debate, to share your views, to listen to your fellow participants and to respond to their different perspectives.

Following the summit, we will report to the COF on what we have heard. Aided by your input, we will then start to build a path forward for postsecondary education and skills training.

Thank you for taking part in Competing for Tomorrow. We are certain that your partnership in this initiative will be instrumental in shaping the COF's vision for a postsecondary education and skills training strategy that benefits Canadians from coast to coast.



Dalton McGuinty  
Premier of Ontario



Jean Charest  
Premier of Québec

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## 1

## THE NEED FOR ACTION NOW

In Canada there are close to 100 public universities and approximately 200 public community colleges and degree granting and other institutions.

In 2004–05, there were 785,000 full-time university students in Canada (an increase of nearly 130,000 in the last three years), as well as 270,000 part-time students.

In 2004, Canadian universities awarded an estimated 135,000 bachelor's degrees, 26,000 master's degrees, and 4,000 doctoral degrees.

Over 736,000 full- and part-time students were enrolled in colleges in 2003. CMEC Website: [www.cmec.ca](http://www.cmec.ca)

Canada is at a crucial point: we are well-positioned to manage the opportunities and challenges of the global economy, but despite existing efforts, we are falling behind in investing in people and encouraging research and innovation.

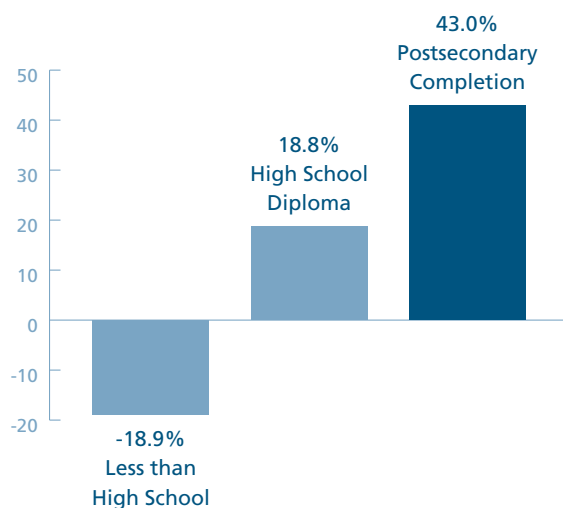
The need to improve postsecondary education and skills training in Canada is driven by global and local challenges. In the global marketplace, our key competitors are moving ahead with economic restructuring, investment in the education and skills of their people, technological change, research and innovation and aggressive competition. The rapid growth of emerging economies, especially in China and India, along with high oil prices and the strong Canadian dollar, are posing substantial challenges for Canada's industries. To remain prosperous in the face of this competition, Canada needs a workforce that is qualified, flexible, adaptable, and innovative, with employees and employers who embrace lifelong learning.

Yet, in Canada, pressures are mounting on our postsecondary programs and institutions; apprenticeship training is not as developed or wide-spread as it should be; our work force is ageing; fewer adults participate in on-going education and training than our competitors; and we face challenges in developing skills in critical areas. Canada's future prosperity and quality of life depends on the plans we make now to succeed in a globally competitive economy.

Canada's colleges and universities are operating in an environment marked by the accelerated development of knowledge and greater competition. Postsecondary institutions have to respond to multiple expectations regarding the production, transmission and transfer of knowledge. To date, postsecondary institutions have succeeded in responding to the growth in demand, but the outlook for new jobs points to major new pressures on postsecondary education. Furthermore, the demand for a highly qualified workforce is expected to continue over the next few decades.

At the same time, it has also been demonstrated that postsecondary education is fundamental for social and cultural development, citizen participation and economic prosperity. According to a Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey, which looked at employment growth and educational attainment during the past decade, employment grew by 43 percent for those with postsecondary qualifications. During that same period, employment declined by 19 percent for those who had not completed their high school qualification. >

## EMPLOYMENT GROWTH (AGE 15+) BY EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, CANADA, 1995–2005



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

“We all lose out when individual Canadians fall short of their educational potential. Raising educational aspirations and increasing investment in education at all levels by individuals, businesses, and governments is a critical way to increase productivity. We think that stakeholders in Canada’s prosperity should be encouraged as a high priority to increase their investment in education.”<sup>1</sup>

### THIS PAPER

The purpose of this summit is to discuss the challenges and priorities for postsecondary education and skills training in Canada and to generate ideas and suggestions on the most critical steps to take in the years ahead. Your contribution to this discussion will help to inform what Premiers McGuinty and Charest report to the Council of the Federation.

The following paper is designed to help shape discussions at the summit. It outlines the first principle of any solution to Canada’s challenges: partnerships and co-operation. The paper then provides a summary of recent comparative international research. Finally, the paper outlines seven discussion themes and related questions for summit discussion.

<sup>1</sup> Roger Martin, *Realizing Canada’s Prosperity Potential*. Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity, 2005, p.22

## 2 KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Effective partnerships begin with shared priorities. Equipping Canadians with the postsecondary education and skills to reach their full potential is the concern of all governments in Canada. The Council of the Federation has agreed that provincial governments, on their own, cannot do everything that needs to be done to ensure the future prosperity of Canadians.

Both the provinces and territories and the federal government have roles to play in ensuring Canada's future prosperity. Both orders of government recognize that they can achieve their goals most effectively through collaboration.

### SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

Under the Canadian Constitution, provincial and territorial governments have exclusive responsibility for all levels of education. Public postsecondary education institutions in Canada derive most of their direct funding from the provinces and territories. The federal government provides support to postsecondary education through fiscal transfers to the provinces and territories, and by funding research and student assistance. The balance is comprised of tuition fees, contracts with business and industry, government research contracts, donations and investment income.

Provinces and territories have full responsibility for labour market training, including apprenticeship training and certification. The federal government indirectly supports the labour market through its economic and fiscal policies and responsibilities for Employment Insurance and trade and commerce.

Colleges and universities across Canada have a central role to play in the knowledge-based economy and society, and in developing a highly skilled workforce that will foster innovation and economic competitiveness. Postsecondary institutions also play a crucial role in their respective communities through teaching, research and service missions.

The perspectives of students and other learners on key issues in postsecondary education and skills training are essential to the success of these systems.

Businesses and other employers also have important roles to play in postsecondary education and skills training. They are after all, the employers of graduates of certificate, apprentice, diploma and degree programs. Many of them are also involved in program advisory committees and provide hands on training for apprentices and co-op students. It is employers who both need and encourage lifelong learning.

Large numbers of workers and unions understand the need for high quality, formal training, to stay up-to-date in the workplace and find solutions to emerging challenges. On-the-job training and lifelong learning are important ways to ensure that workers maintain and improve their productivity. >

## FUNDING PARTNERSHIP

The federal government is a crucial partner in postsecondary education and skills training. However, federal government support has not kept up with emerging needs. Federal transfers through the Canada Social Transfer in support of postsecondary education and social programs were \$10.6 billion in 1994–95 and stand at \$8.4 billion today. It would take \$2.2 billion just to restore these transfers to 1994–95 levels and considerably more to ensure that Canadians will continue to benefit from the postsecondary education and skills training systems that they need in the 21st Century.

Like other Canadians, premiers are aware that substantial new investments will be required in postsecondary education and skills training in order for Canada to compete and thrive in a global economy. Many provinces and territories have invested their resources in these areas, while recognizing that a new partnership with the federal government will be essential for Canada to pull ahead of its competitors.

It is essential for all of us to work collectively and respond in a coordinated way to international competition and new technologies. The most important initiatives to bolster prosperity require close federal-provincial-territorial as well as stakeholder cooperation.

The premiers have invited the federal government to meet with them in order to agree on a Canada-wide education and training strategy and an adequate level of federal funding through the Canada Social Transfer.



# 3

## INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

One of the ways of understanding the state of Canada's preparedness for future challenges is to look at how we compare to other countries on measures that matter. For example, according to most studies, our economic and labour market performance has been good. However, some studies indicate that we have significant room to improve our productivity—a key indicator of standard of living. There is little question that we are facing a decline in labour force growth—which will have implications for our future level of productivity. Some studies suggest that we are also lagging in our commitment to adult education. Finally, it is clear that as a nation, we are not making the same level of investment in innovation and research that some of our competitors do.

### UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

Canada posts an average performance when it comes to obtaining a Bachelor's degree, with the rate only slightly lower than the average for Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. However, Australia and Finland significantly surpass the Canadian rate.

Canada does lag behind international competitors when it comes to achievement at the doctorate level. In this regard, Canada is well below the OECD average. This is a significant impediment to the country's future ability to innovate and compete. Improving our ability to produce doctorate degree holders will help Canada prepare the next generation of professors, researchers and innovators.<sup>2</sup> >

### PERCENTAGE OF TERTIARY GRADUATES TO THE POPULATION AT THE TYPICAL AGE OF GRADUATION

	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	DOCTORATE
Germany	19.2	2.0
Australia	45.4	1.3
Canada**	30.6	0.9
United States*	33.2	1.3
Finland**	45.4	1.9
France**	24.8	1.4
United Kingdom	35.9	1.6
Sweden	32.7	2.8
OECD average (17 countries)	31.8	1.2

Note: International comparisons of the rates of obtaining university degrees must be made carefully since the structure and the scope of the curricula vary greatly according to the country. Moreover, all of the countries do not have equivalent information systems and the quality of the data sent to the OECD for each country may vary considerably.

\* 2000 data

\*\* 2001 data

Sources: OECD, special compilation; Statistics Canada, special compilation

<sup>2</sup> OECD, special compilation; Statistics Canada, special compilation

## LABOUR MARKET PERFORMANCE

By most indications, Canada's economic and labour market performance has been good in recent years. For example:

- Canada's GDP grew at the fastest rate in the G7 nations since 1997.<sup>3</sup>
- Canada's employment growth has also led the industrialized world since 1997.<sup>4</sup>

However, we have no reason to be complacent.

## PRODUCTIVITY

Canada's long-term prosperity is not assured—particularly when the focus is on productivity. Using a range of indicators, the Conference Board of Canada recently ranked Canada as 12th out of 24 OECD countries in economic performance, and noted that this ranking has slipped from 3rd place in 2003.<sup>5</sup>

Knowledge and skills have long been recognized as a key driver of productivity<sup>6</sup> which, in turn, is directly related to living standards. Improvements in human capital raise productivity and economic growth.

If we do not invest sufficiently in our human capital, we will ignore the primary mechanism for raising productivity and ultimately growing our economy and ensuring a higher standard of living for us and our children.

Studies suggest that there is a worrying gap between labour productivity in Canada and its largest trading partner, the United States. “Between 1996 and 2000 labour productivity in Canada and the United States was on the same growth path. Since then these two paths have diverged”<sup>7</sup> with Canada's labour productivity not keeping pace.

The most recent international comparison published by the Conference Board is not reassuring. As the following chart indicates, in 2004 Canada's labour productivity growth was the lowest among 11 international competitors. >

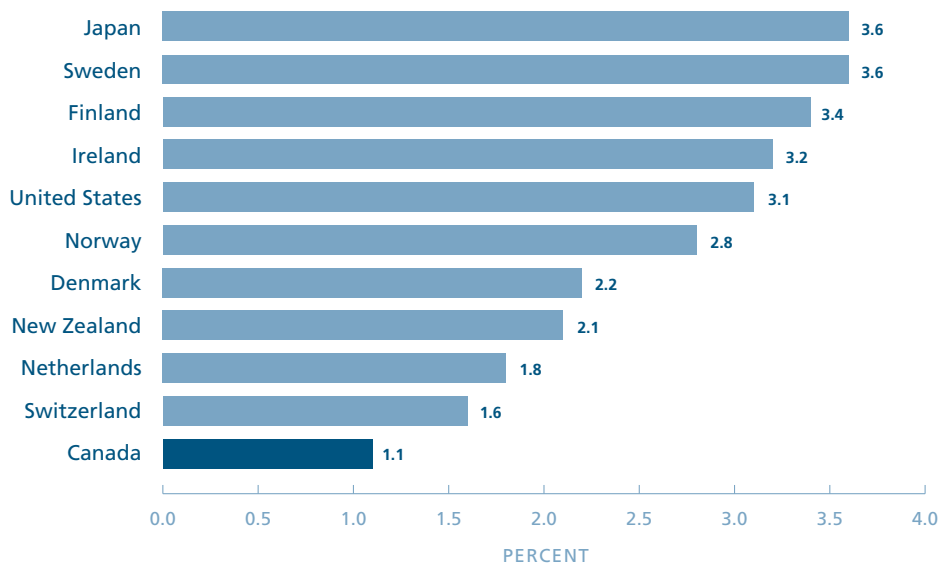
- 3 Government of Canada, Economic and Fiscal Update, November 2005
- 4 Government of Canada, Economic and Fiscal Update, November 2005
- 5 Conference Board of Canada, Performance and Potential 2005–06, October 2005
- 6 Higher productivity is a measure of the extent to which workers continue to produce more in the same hours worked—by working smarter, with better skills, technology, process improvements, etc.
- 7 Centre for the Study of Living Standards, International Productivity Monitor, *An Analysis of the Labour Productivity Growth Slowdown in Canada since 2000*, Number 10, Spring 2005, p.5

The OECD forecasts that, in Canada, where the labour force grew at nearly 1.5 percent annually over the past 50 years, the labour force will decline by an average of 0.1 percent annually over the coming 50 years.

Some countries in Asia and Europe will face a more severe decline in their labour market growth.

At the same time, Canada's major competitor, the United States, is forecast to experience the strongest labour force growth in the OECD, at 0.54 percent per year over the next 50 years.

### LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY GROWTH, INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS, 2004, ANNUAL GROWTH RATE



Source: The Conference Board, Performance 2005: Productivity, Employment and Income in the World's Economies

This data is not the only way to analyze the productivity of nations, and productivity issues and concerns vary between provinces and territories. However, it is widely accepted that improving labour productivity is essential to ensuring the long-term prosperity of Canadians.

### DECLINE IN LABOUR FORCE GROWTH

A key challenge facing all developed countries, including Canada, is the ageing of the work force and potential shortages of skills and labour. The share of workers aged 50 and older in the labour force is projected to rise between 2000 and 2050 across the member countries of the OECD.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, the OECD forecasts that labour force growth in developed countries will slow, stop, or even decline over the next 50 years.<sup>9</sup> In Canada, large numbers of skilled tradespeople are nearing retirement, and the labour force may experience absolute declines in the decades ahead if current patterns of labour force participation do not change. >

8 OECD Database on Ageing and Employment Policies, 2005

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## ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

In an era of rapid technological change and increasing global competition, the importance of making continual improvements to the skills of workers is becoming increasingly apparent.

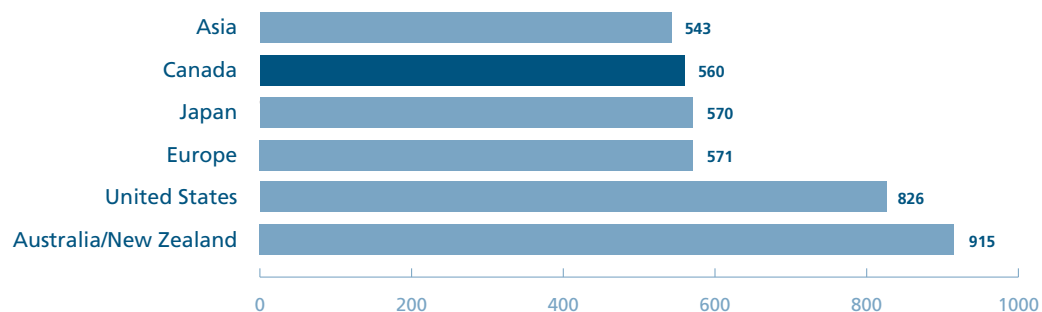
For most adults, the workplace serves as the primary site for learning outside the formal education system. Workers in the skilled trades are especially vital contributors to Canadian prosperity, and their training needs match the pace of technological change. Yet by international standards, Canada does not compare well.

According to internationally-comparable data from the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD), in 2002, employers in Canada spent US\$560 per employee on workplace training. This is considerably less than other OECD countries including the United States, Japan and European countries.

**“We are simply not retaining, recruiting or training tradespeople at the rate required to deal with the growing demand, and we have increased retirement in the baby-boom generation.”**

—Construction Association  
Saskatchewan

## INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON OF TRAINING EXPENDITURES PER EMPLOYEE (US\$), 2002



Source: American Society for Training and Development, 2003 State of the Industry Report

Comparing their own survey results to that of the ASTD, the Conference Board of Canada finds that Canadian employers spend a much lower share of their payroll on training (1.55 percent in 2003) than employers in the United States (2.34 percent in 2003).<sup>10</sup> >

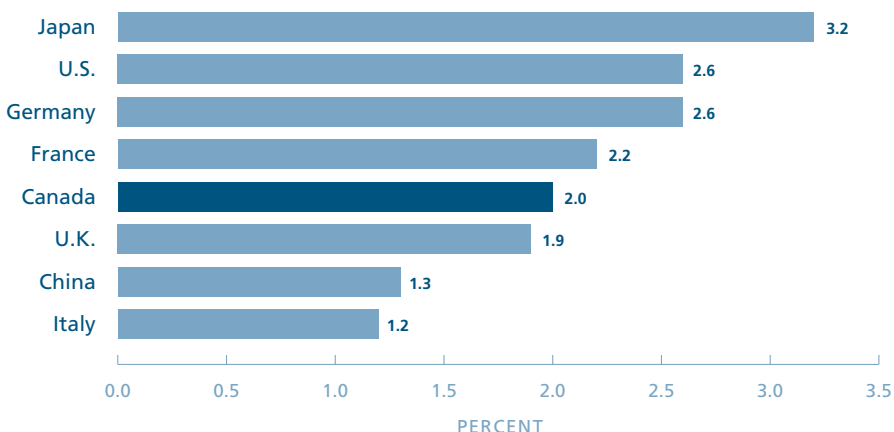
<sup>10</sup> Conference Board of Canada, *Learning and Development Outlook, 2005*

### LOWER INVESTMENT IN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

To provide Canadians with better jobs and incomes, every jurisdiction needs to improve the capacity to generate the knowledge, innovation and research that lead to new products, services and methods of doing business. Innovation rests on the foundation of knowledge created in colleges and universities, in firms, on job-sites and in other research organizations.

Investment in research and development is vital to Canada’s long-term competitiveness and economic growth, yet, as the following chart indicates, expenditure on research and development is currently lower than most of our key competitors.

### GROSS EXPENDITURE ON RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AS A SHARE OF GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT, INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON, 2003



Source: OECD main S&T indicators, and Statistics Canada

The many challenges that Canada faces regarding competing in the global economy make it imperative that we invest more in higher education, and the skills and training of Canada’s labour force if we are to continue to grow and prosper in the 21st Century.

## 4 POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND SKILLS TRAINING— DISCUSSION THEMES

This section of the discussion guide provides seven themes with associated questions to help stimulate discussion at the summit. The themes emerged from the work of the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC), the Provincial-Territorial Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) and others. Each of these themes is considered through the lens of improving Canada’s competitiveness, prosperity and long-term economic growth, as well as social development and democratic citizenship.

At the summit, participants will be asked to take part in a breakout group to discuss one of the seven themes. Summit participants are asked to review the following themes in advance of the summit to enhance their overall understanding of the main priorities and commonalities, and to work through the questions in some detail to prepare for breakout group discussions.

The seven discussion themes are:

- 1 Access to Postsecondary Education and Skills Training
- 2 Quality and Funding of Postsecondary Education and Skills Training
- 3 Participation in the Labour Force
- 4 Skills for the 21st Century Workplace
- 5 Research and Innovation Capacity
- 6 Lifelong Learning for All
- 7 Needs of Rural and Northern Areas >

“Apprenticeship and other skills training programs face challenges in adapting to the needs of today’s economy. A significant number of apprentices are not working full time or in their trade.”

—Newfoundland and Labrador, Fall 2004

#### 4.1 ACCESS

**In Canada, every province and territory faces growing demand for postsecondary education and skills training. With jobs in Canada becoming increasingly knowledge-intensive, ever-growing numbers of people are applying to colleges and universities and apprenticeship training spots.**

**Yet our postsecondary education institutions have indicated that they are experiencing a shortage of funding required to address increasing enrolments, and faculty recruitment needed to replace retiring baby boomers and meet growing needs.**

**The demand has been identified, but the supply is more difficult. Access, for the purposes of this discussion, involves meeting a growing demand for postsecondary education and skills training—greater access for more people. This requires more faculty, more employers willing to hire and train apprentices, more upgrades to physical infrastructure and more equipment, as well as solutions for individuals for whom cost is a barrier.**

- What are the best ways to ensure that more people take advantage of:
  - postsecondary education?
  - skills training?
  
- How can we increase the number of apprentices and apprenticeship programs?
  
- Should governments expand financial assistance programs so that more students qualify for financial support?
  
- How do we ensure that there are investments in capital and in faculty necessary to increase the capacity of our postsecondary institutions?
  
- What else can we do? >

## 4.2 QUALITY AND FUNDING

**Quality education is critical to the realization of Canada’s prosperity potential. Canadian postsecondary institutions and workplaces must be able to compete with the best in the world. To do so, Canadians need the best postsecondary education programs with the best faculty–student ratios, more qualified professors and up-to-date equipment and software in colleges and universities and in the workplace.**

**At the same time, postsecondary education programs and institutions must compare favourably against international competitors to draw the most able students, and produce knowledgeable graduates with cutting-edge skills.**

- What principles and objectives should guide new investments in:
  - postsecondary education?
  - skills training?
  
- How could we improve the quality of apprenticeship programs and improve the completion rate of those who enter such programs?
  
- What is needed to ensure stable and predictable funding for postsecondary education systems?
  
- What are the primary areas of need for new investments in:
  - postsecondary education?
  - skills training?
  
- How can we attract and retain more international students and encourage them to remain in Canada to help build a highly educated and skilled workforce?
  
- How can we promote high-quality learning opportunities abroad for Canadian students to get a broader international perspective?
  
- What scale of new federal investments would be required to improve the quality of:
  - postsecondary education?
  - skills training?
  
- What else can we do? >

“Postsecondary institutions are concerned about their capacity to update and maintain quality education and skills programming. Key challenges include new investments for physical infrastructure, currency of equipment, capacity for faculty renewal... as well as increased capacity to support the research and development so critical to economic growth.”

—Newfoundland and Labrador, Fall 2004



“Due to cultural, social and economic barriers, Manitoba’s Aboriginal youth face difficulties pursuing postsecondary education despite having the capacity to learn. ACCESS programs have assisted students to reach their potential but funding limits the number of students who can benefit.”

—Dr. Emöke Szathmáry,  
President and Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Manitoba

### 4.3 PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR FORCE

Another key issue in Canada is participation in the labour force. Slower population growth means slower labour force growth. To sustain and advance Canada’s standard of living, it will be increasingly important to encourage participation in the labour force of groups who are currently under-represented such as Aboriginal peoples, recent immigrants, persons with disabilities and low-skilled youth and older workers.

Jurisdictions that support high levels of participation in the workforce benefit both the individuals who are working, and society’s overall prosperity. Full labour force participation will be necessary to ensure Canada has the skilled labour supply and educated citizenry necessary to compete in the world economy. To do so, we will need more apprenticeship training positions and more employers to hire and train apprentices.

- How can we enable recent immigrants to enter the labour force more quickly and in a way that uses their skills and the qualifications they already possess?
- How can we encourage more employment and skills development for Aboriginal peoples?
- How do we increase work force participation rates for persons with disabilities?
- How do we ensure that youth have the skills and experience they need to succeed in the workforce?
- How should any additional investments be used encourage under-represented groups to participate in the labour force?
- What else can we do? >

#### 4.4 SKILLS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY WORKPLACE

Canadian workers also need a strong educational base and regular upgrading of their skills to keep up with technological change and competition in a knowledge-based economy. Not only are advanced skills important, but adult literacy skills are also critical for citizens to function in the economy. Labour, government and the training system all have an important role to play in providing the support needed by employers to engage in workplace-based training.

Jurisdictions with a responsive training and apprenticeship system can adapt more quickly to changes in technology and business processes.

“We need to send the message out to industry that it has an investment in building the literacy and numeracy skills of its employees. Businesses need to create a culture of learning.”

—Cyril Meagher, president,  
Allendale Electronics Ltd.,  
January 2006, Nova Scotia

- How do we encourage employers to increase their investments in workplace training as more technology is added to the workplace?
- What kinds of strategies could be used to assist those held back by low levels of basic literacy, numeracy and essential skills?
- How do we better enable postsecondary institutions to provide leading-edge skills and knowledge?
- How can governments, business, labour and other stakeholders work together to help people in the workplace acquire advanced skills?
- What else can we do? >

“There is a need to define roles and responsibilities for institutions, allowing them to become world-class in specific areas; putting top priority on research and innovation.”

—Stakeholder at Minister’s Forum, A Learning Alberta, November 2005, Alberta

#### 4.5 RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

**High quality research and innovation are vital components of Canada’s social and economic well-being. Postsecondary education institutions play a significant role in this. In fact, over one quarter of all research activity in Canada takes place in universities across the country.<sup>11</sup> Harnessing the ability to increase and boost these efforts will enhance Canada’s competitiveness. Governments and business benefit from the research and development that often starts in universities. The spin-offs from a robust research and innovation culture are numerous and diverse, ranging from attracting investment and building economic clusters, to retaining knowledge and talent.**

**The postsecondary education sector is an important contributor to research and development and innovation, all of which are critical to long-term economic growth.**

- What are the best ways to encourage research and innovation at postsecondary institutions?
- How do we encourage better collaboration between industry and universities and colleges for the timely transfer of innovative ideas from postsecondary education institutions to the market?
- How can we increase the number of graduate students and help ensure postsecondary students and faculty conduct leading research in their postsecondary education programs?
- How should additional federal investments help to produce highly educated researchers and highly skilled technicians?
- How can we encourage employers to increase the level of research, development and other forms of innovation in their businesses?
- What else can we do? >

<sup>11</sup> OECD Main Science and Technology Indicators, 2000–2001

## 4.6 LIFELONG LEARNING

**Continuous learning throughout life is an important issue all Canadians. The availability of enough people with an adaptable and flexible range of skills is important to our economic competitiveness and prosperity. As the work world becomes more complex, both employed people and displaced workers need to be continually retraining. Supports need to be in place to assist people with career advice, continuous learning and upgrading of skills.**

**Lifelong learning allows more people to adapt to changes in the workplace and increase their own and the country's prosperity.**

- What can be done to help individuals increase their participation in lifelong learning?
- How can we better encourage employers to provide opportunities for lifelong learning?
- What type of incentives could be used to promote continuous learning and upgrading of skills?
- How can educators better accommodate the lifelong learner who must continue to earn a living?
- How do we help develop a culture of lifelong learning in Canada?
- What role can colleges, universities and training institutions play in lifelong learning?
- What else can we do? >

“There must be opportunities for training at every stage in a person’s life/career. There is a need to develop better mechanisms for employed and unemployed people to have access to career training and education that allows them to transition within and between occupations.”

—Stakeholder at Minister’s Forum, Developing a World Class Labour Force, Alberta, October 2005

“Most Yukon communities are geographically isolated with very small populations—this makes the delivery of education costly.”

—Yukon, December 2005

#### 4.7 RURAL AND NORTHERN AREAS

**Rural and northern areas face unique challenges such as a lower-skilled workforce, older workers and young people moving away to large urban centres. Rural and northern areas require a innovative approach to increasing access to higher education and improving attachment to the labour market. For example, information technology could be a vital means to increase access and provide innovative ways of learning, as well as increase the quality of learning opportunities.**

**People who live in rural and northern areas have a broad variety of training and higher education needs. It can cost more to provide programs in rural and northern areas and students have to travel further to get to the programs they want. There is no simple or single solution. However, it is clear that greater levels of postsecondary participation will promote growth and prosperity in these regions.**

- What strategies and funding could be used in rural and northern areas to improve access to:
  - postsecondary education?
  - skills training?
  
- How could new information technology be used to meet the needs of those who live in rural and northern areas?
  
- How could rural and northern employers better encourage lifelong learning?
  
- What is the right role of the federal government in supporting access to higher education and skills training in rural and northern areas?
  
- What else can we do?

