



Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)

AN UPDATE ON CMEC'S ACTIVITIES

May 1998

The various projects and initiatives that constitute the national education agenda complement those under way in each province and territory, giving a “value-added” to provincial and territorial initiatives by providing the opportunity to adopt a collective approach to dealing with common problems. The work of CMEC is designed to respond to a number of system-wide trends:

- more cooperative efforts at the regional and national levels
- greater accountability to the public
- acceptance of information technology as an integral part of the education experience
- reduced funding for education

Report on Education in Canada

As one way of ensuring greater accountability, CMEC decided to publish a periodic report on education in Canada. The notion of a report of this type, which provides a snapshot of education across the country in a form that is easy to access and understand, was proposed and endorsed by participants at the First National Consultation on Education in May 1994.

The first report was produced in 1995; the second, the *Report on Education in Canada, 1998*, was released on April 9. Its theme comes out of the Second National Consultation on Education — the changing social and economic context and how the education systems are evolving to meet changing realities. Featuring a number of relevant pan-Canadian and jurisdictional-level indicators, the report looks first at how the social and economic context in which education operates has evolved over the past 25 years. Jurisdictional profiles describe what each province and territory is doing to prepare its students to meet the challenges of a changing environment. The final section focusses on transitions from the classroom to the world of work and beyond, describing several innovative projects that train and retrain people, especially youth.

The report is available free of charge from the CMEC Secretariat or from departments and ministries of education. It has also been posted on the CMEC Web site (www.cmec.ca).

CMEC Postsecondary Expectations Project (PEP)

The PEP, launched by ministers in the fall of 1997, evolved out of ongoing discussions at CMEC and ACDME meetings concerning the need for more focus on the postsecondary component of the CMEC mandate and shared interest in articulating specific expectations for the postsecondary education sector.

The PEP is intended to clarify pan-Canadian expectations for postsecondary education/adult learning and to inform the activities of the respective jurisdictions. The specific objectives are as follows:

- to share information and insights on existing policies and practices
- to undertake joint policy and analysis on key issues
- to inform the work of the Canadian Education Statistics Council (CESC)
- to promote partnerships

A consultation document, released in March 1998, proposed expectations in the context of six overarching themes — quality, accountability, accessibility, mobility, relevance and responsiveness, and research and scholarship — and is designed to promote constructive dialogue and cooperation among educational stakeholders (institutions, learners, employers, government, citizens). Public consultations with stakeholders at the pan-Canadian level will be conducted by CMEC; jurisdictions that so choose will consult with their institutions and interested parties. The outcomes of these consultations will inform the report on PSE expectations to be presented to ministers in February 1999.

As part of the overall project, two thematic initiatives have also been undertaken. The two themes selected for in-depth review and analysis are university research and learner pathways and transitions. These initiatives are being led by Alberta and New Brunswick respectively.

Support for the project has been provided in the form of special contributions from jurisdictions, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), and Industry Canada.

Joint initiatives in the area of curriculum

In September 1993, ministers announced their intention to undertake joint initiatives in the area of curriculum; in February 1995, they adopted the *Protocol for Collaboration on School Curriculum*. The protocol establishes a process for joint initiatives that are broad in nature, covering not only curriculum development, but also assessment, program evaluation, learning resources, and technology, for both face-to-face and distance delivery.

In October 1997, CMEC released the *Common framework of science learning outcomes, K to 12*. All jurisdictions except Quebec participated in the Pan-Canadian Science Project, which involved the development of the framework. Throughout the project, anglophones and francophones worked together to ensure the development of materials in both English and French. The document is available free of charge from the CMEC Secretariat and is also featured on the CMEC Web site.

At their meeting in February 1998, ministers agreed to continue to work collaboratively in the area of curriculum. They directed that comparability studies be completed by February 1999 for mathematics,

English language arts, and French language arts, and that a proposal for collaborative work in the area of citizenship education be developed for their consideration in September 1998.

Information technologies in education

In February 1998, ministers considered a first draft of a strategy for collaborative work in the area of information technologies in education. They agreed that CMEC activities should focus on fostering an exchange of information among jurisdictions, with particular attention being paid to learning outcomes, educator training and professional development, and research on the impact of information technologies on the learning experience.

School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP)

The first cycle of assessments of 13- and 16-year-old Canadian students in mathematics, reading and writing, and science was completed in 1997 with the release of the SAIP science results. The second mathematics assessment was administered in 1997 and results made available in 1998. The second reading and writing assessment is well under way — the tests were administered in April and May, and scoring of the student tests will take place this summer in preparation for analysing results and drafting the public report, due to be released in January 1999. Work on the last assessment in the second cycle is advancing according to established timelines, with the administration of the second science assessment scheduled for spring 1999.

SAIP's practice of setting expectations in the three assessment areas is well established. Four expectation-setting sessions for both science and mathematics were held in September 1996 and 1997 respectively. The sessions involved a wide range of education stakeholders as well as parents, students, and representatives from business and labour. A similar session for reading and writing is scheduled for fall 1998. The model for establishing pan-Canadian expectations is based on the expectation-setting session for reading and writing held in Ottawa in November 1995.

Canadian Education Statistics Council (CESC) Programs: Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program (PCEIP) and Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda (PCERA)

The PCEIP is a joint CMEC/Statistics Canada initiative to provide policy makers and the public with a range of measures about the performance of education systems in Canada. The first report was published in 1996. Since this time, CMEC and Statistics Canada have consulted with jurisdictions across Canada about their information needs, and the indicator set is being developed to provide current data on the key inputs, processes, and outputs of education systems that are of interest to all jurisdictions in Canada.

During the consultations with CMEC and Statistics Canada, jurisdictions indicated their interest in research and analysis that would accompany the PCEIP and explore the possible causal relationship among the indicators. Jurisdictions were also interested in policy research that did not necessarily stem from the PCEIP. In response, a process to develop a Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda (PCERA) has been initiated. In addition to supporting PCEIP, it is envisioned that the PCERA project will bring the key policy-related research issues that are of interest to all jurisdictions to the attention of education researchers

and funding agencies in Canada. A list of topics has been compiled, and work is under way to build partnerships with funding agencies, governments, and researchers.

Education-related international activities

Canadian education authorities participate in education-related activities of international intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) through the coordinating efforts of CMEC working with the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). Protocols for ensuring Canadian federal authority in the conduct of foreign affairs and provincial authority in education matters have been set out in the document *Understandings Between the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada and the Department of External Affairs*.

The major IGOs of which Canada is a member and which have an education committee or body are as follows: OECD, UNESCO, International Bureau of Education (IBE), Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Commonwealth, and Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO). Although not a member, Canada was granted official observer status at the Council of Europe in 1996, and attends the Education Committee and the Higher Education and Research Committee meetings when appropriate, as well as those of the Standing Conference of European Ministers of Education. CMEC is also developing close ties with the Education Commission of the States, having attended the last three AGMs at ministerial level.

Participation involves representation on standing committees — OECD Education Committee and Governing Board of the Centre for Education Research and Innovation (CERI); Executive Board of the IBE; APEC Education Forum (National Coordinator); CERI's International Indicators of Education Systems (INES) Project (National Coordinator); IEA (National Coordinator) — as well as contributions to various studies, responses to requests for national reports, and attendance at meetings at both the officials and ministerial levels. Representation includes provincial/territorial officials and/or CMEC Secretariat officials.

The Federal-Provincial Consultative Committee on Education-Related International Activities (FPCCERIA), co-chaired by the chair of the ACDME and the assistant deputy minister of communications and policy planning of DFAIT, is the body responsible for advising on matters of importance to both orders of government. Members are the deputy ministers of the ministers on the CMEC Executive, but contacts have been named in all provinces and territories. The tenth meeting of the committee was held in April 1998. The emerging issues for the group are internationalization of education, marketing of educational goods and services, and improving the process for initiating and implementing memoranda of understanding when dealing with education-related subjects.

CMEC is an *ex officio* member of the Executive Committee of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and participates in meetings of its Subcommission on Education and its Education Steering Committee when possible.

With CMEC's approval, Canada ratified the *UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the States Belonging to the Europe Region*. CMEC and HRDC jointly fund the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC), set up under the convention (see below).

CMEC coordinates visits from foreign delegations and receives them at the rate of about two per month.

CMEC monitors bilateral cultural agreements signed between Canada and other countries for reference to education-related matters.

Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC)

CICIC was established to assist Canada in carrying out its obligations under the terms of the UNESCO convention that promotes international mobility by advocating wider recognition of academic and professional qualifications.

During its four years of operation, CICIC has served a wide range of functions:

- referring thousands of individuals and organizations to the relevant authorities for evaluation and recognition of qualifications
- collecting and disseminating information about higher education systems in Canada to ensure that Canadian qualifications are evaluated fairly abroad
- facilitating access for Canadians to information on education systems and procedures for the recognition of qualifications abroad

Because of increasing demand, several fact sheets were prepared to provide general information on recognition and assessment of credentials more effectively. Updates of the brochure, as well as *Postsecondary Education in Canada - Overview, Volume I* and *Postsecondary Education in Canada - The Provinces, Volume II*, have been prepared, and a new database on Canadian postsecondary institutions officially recognized in each province and territory has been developed. All publications, brochures, fact sheets, and news bulletins, as well as the texts of conventions and the guiding principles for good practices are available on CICIC's Web site at <http://www.cmec.ca/cicic/> and, where appropriate, have been distributed to missions abroad.

Because of the diversity of education systems across Canada and the autonomy of institutions of higher education and professional regulatory bodies, CICIC functions not only as a central coordinator in gathering and sharing information but also in a brokering or facilitating capacity to bring organizations and individuals together to improve recognition practices.

CICIC has acted as a catalyst in the establishment of the Provincial Assessment Committee (PAC), which has developed a basic document in the field of recognition entitled *General Guiding Principles for Good Practice in the Assessment of Foreign Credentials*. In collaboration with other PAC members, CICIC is currently working on the portability of assessment reports and on the development of a framework for setting and upholding standards of quality in credentials assessment.

CICIC has provided assistance to governments as they consider ratification of the joint Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications related to Higher Education in the European Region. This convention was signed by a provincial minister last October, and ratification is

expected for fall 1998. CICIC is coordinating Canadian responses to various international surveys for APEC, UNESCO/CEPES, the Council of Europe, and the European Commission.

Official-Languages Programs

CMEC, on behalf of the provinces and territories, negotiates a protocol, or umbrella agreement, with the federal government on the official languages in education, under which close to \$200 million is transferred to the provinces and territories each year. Jurisdictions sign bilateral agreements with Ottawa in keeping with the terms of the protocol.

As well, CMEC administers two national programs, the Summer Language Bursary Program (SLBP) and the Official-Language Monitor Program (OLMP), which are funded by Canadian Heritage. Under the SLBP, postsecondary students receive bursaries to enable them to take a 5-week intensive course in their second official language. In a sub-component of the program, francophone students from minority areas may receive bursaries to study in their first language. In the OLMP, postsecondary students who are enrolled full-time in an institution, usually in another jurisdiction, work part-time under the supervision of regular teachers, helping students with their second language. Some monitors are placed in rural or semi-urban areas and work full-time. In both the full-time and part-time programs, there is a sub-component for francophone schools in minority areas.