

CREATING A MORE EFFICIENT LABOUR MARKET

As part of an ongoing analysis of Canada's skills and learning needs in the knowledge economy, Human Resources Development Canada asked the Centre for the Study of Living Standards (CSLS) to host a National Roundtable to gain a better understanding of what is required to create a more efficient labour market.

Leading members of the business, labour, public policy, non-governmental organization and academic communities were invited to attend the Ottawa conference on February 26-27, 2001. They were asked to examine the recommendations of the Expert Panel on Skills report, released in February 2000, and to assess support for common action in the area of skills and learning.

Discussions at the Roundtable revolved around four topics:

- Ways to improve the effectiveness of sector councils
- The role of the labour market information system in improving labour market efficiency
- The effectiveness of immigration in meeting the current needs of the labour market
- The strengths and weaknesses of the Canadian apprenticeship system

Key Findings

Roundtable participants concluded that Canada's experiment with sector councils has been unique in the world, that the results have been positive, that the federal government should strongly support this initiative, and that provincial governments should take more interest in it.

Stakeholders recognized that Canada has one of the best labour market information systems in the world but felt improvements could be made to make the system more timely, accurate, relevant and accessible at the local level.

Two distinct pictures emerged of immigration's role in meeting the needs of Canada's labour market. Although highly skilled immigrants are in short supply in some critical high technology industries, less skilled immigrants are encountering more difficulty than in the past in adjusting to Canada's labour market.

An examination of apprenticeships revealed that, while they can contribute significantly to skills development, the system is not living up to its potential. The limited number of people who complete apprenticeship programs, the lack of apprenticeships outside the construction trades, and the limited representation of women, aboriginals and visible minorities in apprenticeship programs were pointed to as weaknesses that should be addressed.

Possible Actions for Partners

- The federal government and provincial governments should give priority to streamlining and better coordinating their sector-specific active labour market initiatives. Governments should make funds available to sector councils for the delivery of training programs; permit overhead costs to be deemed an allowable expense for sector council projects; and, allow greater flexibility in accounting practices for sector councils.
- To make labour market information more readily available and valuable, standards should be established to ensure guidance counsellors are able to provide adequate counselling on labour market opportunities. The development of a direct vacancy monitoring survey could identify local labour market opportunities while the greater use of administrative data and greater integration of existing data sources would improve the timeliness of labour market information. Governments should make labour market information more affordable to Canadians.
- To increase access to the skills needed in various sectors, the federal government should avail itself of private sector expertise in the assessment of labour shortages for immigration purposes as well as ease the process required to bring temporary workers into Canada. To increase the utilization of untapped skills among new immigrants, Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition should be strengthened to measure the credentials of immigrants in order to facilitate their integration into the labour market. As well, adequate income support and programs should be provided to ensure recent immigrants have ample opportunity to acquire the basic skills they need to succeed in the labour market.
- Large differences in the effectiveness of the apprenticeship system among provinces suggest much could be gained from sharing best practices. To improve the effectiveness of the apprenticeship system, modularisation should be implemented, pre-apprenticeship programs in high schools developed, and the greater use of laddering, whereby qualifications acquired in apprenticeship courses could be applied to other post-secondary programs, should be encouraged.