

ROUNDTABLE REPORTS REINFORCE NEED TO PREPARE FOR CANADA'S SKILLS AND LEARNING CHALLENGES

Ottawa – Findings and recommendations flowing from a series of National Roundtables on Skills and Learning confirm that the quality and quantity of Canadians' skills will primarily determine Canada's continued economic growth and quality of life.

The Honourable Jane Stewart, Minister of Human Resources Development Canada, today welcomed the findings in reports on skills and learning released by The Centre for the Study of Living Standards, Canadian Policy Research Networks and The Conference Board of Canada. The three organizations hosted National Roundtables to examine recommendations in the February 2000 report of the Expert Panel on Skills and to gauge support for future action on a shared skills and learning agenda.

“The 21st century economy is a people-centred economy that depends on individual's skills. We now compete globally on the quantity and quality of our ideas,” explained Minister Stewart. “These valuable documents underscore that Canada's skills challenge is a national challenge and that progress on this priority issue will require a long-term partnership with business, labour, educators, community groups and individual Canadians.”

The National Roundtables were set up to consult with representatives from industry, unions, the academic community, voluntary organizations and opinion leaders to gain a better understanding of Canada's skills and learning gaps, challenges and opportunities in a knowledge economy which is transforming both the nature of the Canadian economy and the nature of the work Canadians do.

The first roundtable in Ottawa, hosted by The Centre for the Study of Living Standards, explored ways to create a more efficient labour market. The second roundtable in Edmonton, hosted by the Canadian Policy Research Networks, examined how to increase learning opportunities and remove barriers to lifelong learning. The final roundtable in Toronto, hosted by The Conference Board of Canada, was designed to determine how to build and sustain a culture of innovation and entrepreneurialism.

“The Roundtable revealed much common ground among the stakeholders on both the importance of the skills agenda for Canadians, and on specific policies that should be followed to meet this challenge,” said Andrew Sharpe, Executive Director, Center for the Study of Living Standards. “We hope our insights will be given serious consideration by all levels of government in their development of policies to make the labour market more efficient.”

“Participants in the National Learning Roundtable expressed a widely-held concern that Canada is not moving fast enough to increase learning opportunities and to remove barriers to learning,” added Judith Maxwell, President, Canadian Policy Research Networks. “We can’t afford to leave anyone behind. This is vital not only for the well being of the individual, but for a healthy economy and society.”

“The combination of the right skills, attitudes and behaviours is not optional in the knowledge economy. Our abilities as people lie at the heart of our country’s competitive performance,” concluded Prem Benimadhu, Vice-president, Center for Management Effectiveness, The Conference Board of Canada. “Canada needs people who are both inventive and entrepreneurial if we are to build and sustain a culture of innovation that will maintain our high standard of living and quality of life.”

The most recent Speech from the Throne indicated the Government of Canada’s intention to invest in skills and lifelong learning to “*build a world-leading economy driven by innovation, ideas and talent*”, recognizing that the countries that succeed in the knowledge economy will be those in which all citizens are able to realize their full potential. It pledged to build on the significant federal investments in human resource development and innovation, and to collaborate with a range of partners to multiply the supply of skilled workers.

The National Roundtables are part of an ongoing process to reach a common understanding of skills and learning challenges in the future.

For further information on the three final reports of the National Roundtables, visit the following Web sites or contact:

The Centre for the Study of Living Standards

Canadian Policy Research Networks

Conference Board of Canada

HRDC