



POLYTECHNICSCANADA

Study on Accessibility to Post-secondary Education

Polytechnics Canada Submission to the Senate Committee on
Social Affairs, Science and Technology

June 11, 2010

SUMMARY

Polytechnics Canada recommends that the Senate Committee reviewing Accessibility to Post-Secondary Education focus on three initiatives within federal jurisdiction that will ensure a high-quality workforce to boost Canadian productivity and prosperity:

1. Ensure a transparent, accountable and fixed percentage formula for a Post-Secondary Education Transfer that protects the needs of Canadian learners.
 2. Inclusion of college and polytechnic graduates in the renewal of the Federal Public Service.
 3. Ensure a balanced approach to innovation by inclusion of applied research in all federal R&D spending.
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Polytechnic Education

Over the last decade the polytechnic institution has emerged in Canada as a third pillar of post-secondary education (PSE) joining colleges and universities. Polytechnic institutions provide a unique type of education that combines theoretical knowledge with industry-relevant practical experience in key professional disciplines, requiring students to be actively engaged in applied research. More than 90% of polytechnic graduates find work in their field within six months of graduation.

Polytechnic institutions are quick to adapt to the industry and community needs and serve a broad range of students:

- High school graduates,
- Adults (continuing education, re-skilling, re-training and corporate training),
- Recent immigrants,
- International students, and
- University graduates (In fact, 15-20% of full-time students at polytechnic institutions have had a prior university degree.)

Though polytechnic institutions offer a broad range of credentials from apprenticeships to certificates and diplomas, a key defining feature of polytechnics is that they have been given degree-granting status in the provincial legislation that governs them. They currently offer 72 bachelor degrees with a mandatory applied research project in the final year.

Polytechnics Canada

Polytechnics Canada is a national advocacy organization of nine polytechnic institutions—they comprise Canada's largest colleges and institutes of technology. Collectively these institutions represent more than 128,000 full-time and 414,000 part-time and continuing education students. The current nine members are located in the key economic regions of Canada:

- **Lower Fraser Valley** - British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT)
- **Calgary/Oil Sands Corridor** - Olds College, SAIT Polytechnic

- **Kitchener/Guelph/Waterloo High-tech triangle** - Conestoga College Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning
- **Golden Horseshoe** - George Brown College of Applied Arts and Technology, Humber Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology and Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning
- **National Capital Region** - Algonquin College of Applied Arts and Technology

THREE FEDERAL AREAS OF ACTION TO INCREASE HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS AND OUTCOMES

Dedicated Transfer

Current Canada Social Transfer (CST) cash levels will expire in 2013-2014. By all estimates, 40% of the CST in all provinces is now going to health and this is expected to grow. Any growth in health transfer payments will likely mean a reduction in other social program transfers including those for PSE, given the past record in this area. We do not believe that provinces will negotiate the renewal of the CST/Health Accord mindful of the need for a post-secondary funding balance. Without a permanent percentage within CST devoted to PSE, there will be an effective decrease in transfer payments for PSE as seen in the 1992/1993 program cuts.

A decrease in PSE funding will put at risk the operating grants for colleges and polytechnics. These institutions cannot rely on the extensive endowment funds like universities can. At the same time, colleges and polytechnics anticipate a steady growth in demand for education and training from all groups of learners, given industry requirements for highly qualified skilled workers.

Therefore, the next two years present a crucial opportunity in the context of the federal budget and the negotiations of the renewal of the CST to lock-in a realistic and escalating scale of earmarked funds for PSE. Even at current transfer levels, provinces (and their post-secondary institutions) are being compensated at 1993 levels for each post-secondary student, inevitably undermining quality of and access to higher education.

Polytechnic Degrees

The emergence of bachelor degree programs in polytechnic institutions is a response to demands from learners and industry/employers for more degree graduates in professional disciplines. These polytechnic degree graduates are “innovation literate.” Innovation literacy is a key outcome of degree study at our institutions. This direct involvement of the students in applied research throughout their studies, has enabled them to more ably adapt to changing work conditions and to be proactive and entrepreneurial in problem-solving. With human capital being a key driver of innovation, recognizing the career-ready skills of polytechnic graduates and fostering entrepreneurship in developing innovations in products and services will enhance and build Canada’s innovation capacity.

Current efforts to renew the Public Service of Canada, the largest employer in the country, have completely overlooked this new breed of bachelor’s degree graduates, in addition to highly trained technicians and technologists with advanced credentials from colleges and polytechnics. Entry level officer positions in the Federal Public Service continue to require a “university

degree” instead of a “publicly recognized post-secondary degree.” In addition, credential creep in the Public Service has led to positions requiring university degrees when advanced three year diplomas (often in areas such as business, human resources and supply management) would have sufficed. The federal government can set an example for other employers in Canada by leveling the playing field for college and polytechnic graduates.

Applied Research

Polytechnics Canada welcomes recent signals from the federal government that polytechnic applied research can advance commercialization of research for the private sector, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that do not have a strong record of R&D investment. In Budget 2010 and through pilot announcements by FedDev Ontario, the Government of Canada has begun to address the serious imbalance in federally-funded research at academic institutions which has historically focused on curiosity-based inventions, as opposed to late-stage commercialization and product or process innovation.

Members of Polytechnics Canada are leaders in providing late-stage commercialization services to local and regional industry. From 2008-2009, our nine members have undertaken and/or completed 253 applied research projects with industry, leading to high quality entrepreneurial jobs for our graduates for whom applied research was part of the core curriculum.

However, in 2008, our nine members received only \$1.8 million for research whereas the university sector received over \$2.7 billion (federal funding support). For every dollar of university research, applied research received only 1/10th of a cent. Even with the modest funding available, Polytechnics Canada members have proven our capacity to work effectively with Canadian businesses and produce customer-driven results.

Polytechnics Canada believes that the federal role in research and development should be one of seeking to re-balance the existing research funds to focus on innovation (and not just invention), and to foster collaboration among all actors in the innovation chain, so that Canadian SMEs can benefit from the unique and different contributions of university and polytechnic research. Canada’s continued innovation lag, when compared with its international competitors, will only be overcome when funding for innovation is seen as a contributor to economic development and job growth. All post-secondary graduates are contributors to innovation growth. The preponderant focus on graduate studies overlooks the vital contribution that those with applied experience can bring to the economy.

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