



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CANADA

**RAISING ADULT LITERACY SKILLS:
THE NEED FOR A PAN-CANADIAN RESPONSE**

**Report of the Standing Committee on
Human Resources Development and the
Status of Persons with Disabilities**

**Judi Longfield, M.P.
Chair**

June 2003

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has the honour to present its

THIRD REPORT

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities agreed to present a report on literacy: "Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Reponses".

After hearing evidence the Committee agreed to report to the House as follows:

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1 — A PROFILE OF LOW LITERACY SKILLS IN CANADA	5
CHAPTER 2 — TIME FOR LEADERSHIP	11
I. STRENGTHENING FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL LITERACY PARTNERSHIPS: A PAN-CANADIAN ACCORD ON LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	12
II. MAKING FEDERAL LITERACY POLICY MORE COHERENT	16
CHAPTER 3 — COMPONENTS OF A FEDERAL CONTRIBUTION TO PAN-CANADIAN LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	21
I. RECOGNIZING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR, EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVES AND LEARNERS.....	21
II. THE ROLE OF THE CANADIAN LEARNING INSTITUTE.....	23
III. ASSESSING PRIOR LEARNING AND RESURRECTING THE CONCEPT OF A LEARNING PASSPORT	25
IV. DESIGNING AN ABORIGINAL STRATEGY	28
1. Aboriginal Communities — Education and Literacy	28
2. Federal Programs — Aboriginal Education and Literacy.....	29
3. Aboriginal Literacy — What Do We Know?.....	31
V. BUILDING CAPACITY, STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND DEVELOPING NEW APPROACHES	36
1. Expanding the Mandate and the Capacity of the National Literacy Secretariat.....	36
2. Helping Communities and Families	42
3. Early School Leavers.....	47
4. Literacy and Persons with Disabilities	49
5. Newcomers to Canada.....	54

6. Literacy, Justice and Corrections	57
A. Literacy and the Criminal Justice System	57
B. Literacy Skills of Offenders in Canada.....	58
C. Adult Basic Education Programs in Correctional Service Canada's Institutions	61
VI. LITERACY AND THE WORKPLACE.....	63
CONCLUSION	73
LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS	75
APPENDIX A — CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS CHARACTERIZING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION/LITERACY NATIONWIDE.....	85
APPENDIX B — LIST OF WITNESSES	93
APPENDIX C — LIST OF BRIEFS	97
REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE.....	99
DISSENTING OPINION —BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS	101
MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS.....	105

INTRODUCTION

Canada has a long heritage in adult literacy training, dating back to the turn of the last century. Founded in 1899, the Canadian Reading Camp Movement (which became Frontier College in 1922) sent university students into the wilderness to teach labourers, mostly lumberjacks and miners, how to read and write.¹ Although the federal government has long recognized the importance of adult literacy, it has never really established itself at the forefront of this issue. On 1 October 1986, the federal government committed itself, in the Speech from the Throne, “to develop measures to ensure that Canadians have access to the literacy skills that are the prerequisites for participation in an advanced economy.”² The National Literacy Secretariat was created the following year. Despite the Secretariat’s good work, however, and the thousands of productive literacy partnerships that it has helped to create, Canada’s low literacy skills problem has persisted.

We have been told that by 2004, more than 70% of all new jobs created will require some form of post-secondary education, and that skill requirements in the Canadian labour market will continue to rise in the years ahead. We also know that the labour force is aging and increasing more slowly. In fact, more than one-half of the people who will be in the labour force in 2015 are already in it. Hence, many of today’s workers will have to supply tomorrow’s skill requirements. While we are aware that the skills of some of these individuals are currently underutilized, the Committee is extremely concerned that more than 40% of working-age Canadians lack the necessary basic literacy skills required for successful participation in our rapidly changing labour market. This situation represents significant private and social costs, and we fear that failure to address this problem will only heighten these costs in years to come. The Committee was constantly reminded that literacy skills have a fundamental influence on all aspects of our lives, including, for example, our families, our health, our democracy, our work and our communities. “Literacy enables all citizens to fully realize their personal potential and their potential as citizens in our community.”³

On 30 January 2001, the federal government announced in the Speech from the Throne that it would “invite the provinces and territories along with the private sector and voluntary organizations to launch a national initiative with the goal of significantly increasing the proportion of adults with higher-level literacy skills.”⁴ Combating Canada’s

¹ Linda Shohet, Executive Director for the Centre for Literacy of Quebec, provided the Committee with an interesting chronology of the development of adult basic education and literacy training in Canada. This chronology, along with a modest update, can be found in Appendix A of our report.

² House of Commons, *Debates*, Speech from the Throne, 1 October 1986, p. 14.

³ Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (hereafter referred to as HRDSPD), *Evidence* (16:20), Meeting No. 12, 11 February 2003.

⁴ House of Commons, *Debates* (14:20), Speech from the Throne, 30 January 2001.

low literacy skills problem surfaced again in the 30 September 2002 Speech from the Throne, when the federal government indicated that it would build on its investments in human capital, including literacy.

At the National Summit on Innovation and Learning, held on 18 and 19 November 2002, a strong signal was sent to governments in this country that it is time to seriously address the problem of low literacy in Canada. More than 500 Summit participants from the private sector, non-government organizations, academia and government were asked to identify the priority actions required by the private and public sectors to realize Canada's vision of becoming one of the most innovative and skilled countries in the world. One of 18 priority recommendations that were adopted to further this goal was the establishment of "a pan-Canadian literacy and essential skills development system, supported by federal, provincial and territorial governments. Establish programs to improve literacy and basic skills based on individual and community needs and interests."⁵

In recognition of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012), and welcoming an opportunity to help shape the federal government's contribution to a pan-Canadian literacy and essential skills development system, the Committee agreed on 28 January 2003 to meet with the Minister of Human Resources Development Canada, national literacy organizations and literacy experts. On 25 February 2003, Committee members agreed to hear many other groups and individuals in March and April 2003 to complete our study on adult literacy.

During our study, which we believe to be the first of its kind by a parliamentary committee,⁶ members became increasingly aware of the strong and valuable partnerships that have been developed over the years with literacy organizations, employers, employee representatives, educators and a vast number of other stakeholders, all of whom are dedicated to improving the literacy skills of Canadians. We are impressed by the hard work and commitment demonstrated by our witnesses to raise literacy levels among Canadians. But there is only so much that the literacy community can do, and we think that its capacity has been reached. Without additional public and private sector investments in this critical area of human capital, Canada will lose a major opportunity to improve the economic and social welfare of many thousands of willing participants who lack the necessary basic skills to participate more fully in Canadian society. Moreover, the spillover economic benefits accruing to Canadians as a result of those investments would also be lost.

⁵ Government of Canada, *National Summit on Innovation and Learning: Summary*, 2002, Appendix 3, p. 87.

⁶ Although not specifically focused on adult literacy, we recognize that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs tabled a report in December 1990 entitled *You Took My Talk: Aboriginal Literacy and Empowerment*.

Except in the case of First Nations people living on reserves, education is within the constitutional purview of the provinces and territories. But low literacy is a national problem, and it is in this context that we encourage the federal government to work with the provinces and territories to address Canada's low adult literacy skills problem. The federal government must continue to do its share; this is why our report calls for a meaningful allocation of federal resources to address this serious problem.

I want to stress so much that where we are today, we are in great difficulty in being able to move forward and develop the literacy programs that are needed right now, needed yesterday, in fact. The accelerated change that's going on is going to make this problem even more difficult. We are not even keeping pace. We need to raise that curve, start to keep pace, and make sure people have the skills they need, not only for the workplace, but for all elements within the workplace. It's a democracy issue, it's an access issue. **(Ian Thorne, Co-ordinator, National Literacy Project, Communications, Energy, and Paperworkers Union of Canada, New Brunswick Coalition for Literacy)**⁷

Our report begins with a brief overview of the extent of Canada's low literacy skills problem, as identified by the results of the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey. The next chapter discusses the need for a coherent literacy policy within the federal government and calls for joint federal/provincial/territorial action to address the problem of low literacy. The last chapter identifies many key areas where the federal government could make a significant contribution in this regard and discusses, among other things, the need to: design an Aboriginal literacy strategy; expand the mandate and capacity of the National Literacy Secretariat; help families and communities, persons with disabilities, early school leavers, immigrants and refugees, and inmates to combat low literacy; and address the needs of low literacy individuals in the Canadian workplace.

⁷ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (17:20), Meeting No. 19, 25 March 2003.

CHAPTER 1 — A PROFILE OF LOW LITERACY SKILLS IN CANADA

In 1989, the National Literacy Secretariat (Secretary of State) commissioned Statistics Canada to conduct a survey to profile literacy skills among the Canadian adult population. This survey, known as *Literacy Skills Used in Daily Activities* (LSUDA), dispelled the notion that people were either literate or illiterate and introduced a new way of defining literacy as a continuum of skills. The LSUDA used four literacy scales, to identify increasing literacy proficiency. According to the results of this survey, 16% of Canadians had literacy skills that were too limited to deal with most of the printed material encountered in everyday life, while 22%, considered to be “narrow” readers, could perform familiar reading tasks, but experienced difficulties with tasks involving new reading material.⁸ Hence, in 1989 about 38% of those aged 16 to 69 had a prose literacy proficiency comparable to Levels 1 and 2 in the 1994 *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS), a groundbreaking survey modeled on the LSUDA.⁹

Sponsored in Canada by the National Literacy Secretariat and the Applied Research Branch of Human Resources Development Canada, the IALS was managed by Statistics Canada, in cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Eurostat, and UNESCO. This survey was the first multi-country, multi-language assessment of adult literacy. Initially, the IALS was conducted in seven industrialized countries (Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States). Between 1994 and 1998, the number of countries participating in the IALS expanded to a total of 20.¹⁰ Each country published its own results.

The IALS sample in Canada was drawn from the *Labour Force Survey*. As this survey did not include residents of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, inmates in institutions, persons living on Indian reserves and full-time members of the Canadian Armed Forces, the IALS sample excluded important elements of this country’s population.

⁸ *International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS): Backgrounder* (provided to the Committee by Human Resources Development Canada).

⁹ In our report, we use the term “low literacy skills” to refer to individuals with a literacy proficiency equal to Levels 1 or 2. Level 1 indicates very low literacy skills. At this level, individuals have difficulty identifying, for example, the correct amount of medicine to give a child from the information found on the package. At Level 2, individuals can deal only with material that is simple and clearly laid out, provided the tasks involved are not too complex. Individuals in Level 2 have typically adapted their low literacy skills to everyday life, but would have difficulty learning new information requiring a higher level of literacy skills.

¹⁰ In addition to the original seven, these include Australia, Belgium, Chile, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal, Slovenia and the United Kingdom.

The IALS measured variations in the literacy skills of adults, assessing common skills for various tasks. The survey defined literacy as the ability to understand and use printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential.¹¹ Three types of literacy domains were measured: prose literacy, document literacy and quantitative literacy. Prose literacy refers to one's ability to understand and use information from texts such as product labels, information manuals, news stories or fiction. Document literacy captures one's ability to find and use information from documents such as job applications, schedules, maps or tables. Quantitative literacy measures the ability to make calculations with numbers embedded in text such as calculating interest, balancing a cheque book or completing an order form.

Key findings of the IALS included the following:

- Important differences in literacy skills were established across and within nations.
- Literacy skill deficits were not only found among marginalized groups, but affected large percentages of the entire adult population.
- Literacy is strongly correlated with life chances and use of opportunities, both social and economic.
- Education strongly influences literacy, but it is not the only factor.
- Literacy skills, like muscles, are maintained and strengthened through regular use.
- Adults with low literacy skills do not usually acknowledge or recognize that their skills deficits may pose a problem.¹²

In terms of other countries, Canada consistently outranked the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand in all three literacy domains. In terms of prose literacy, Canada ranked fifth (behind Sweden, Finland, Norway and the Netherlands) among the 20 countries surveyed between 1994 and 1998. In terms of

¹¹ Human Resources Development Canada, *Backgrounder on the International Adult Literacy Survey* (see <http://www.nald.ca/nls/ials/ialsreps/ialsbk1.htm>).

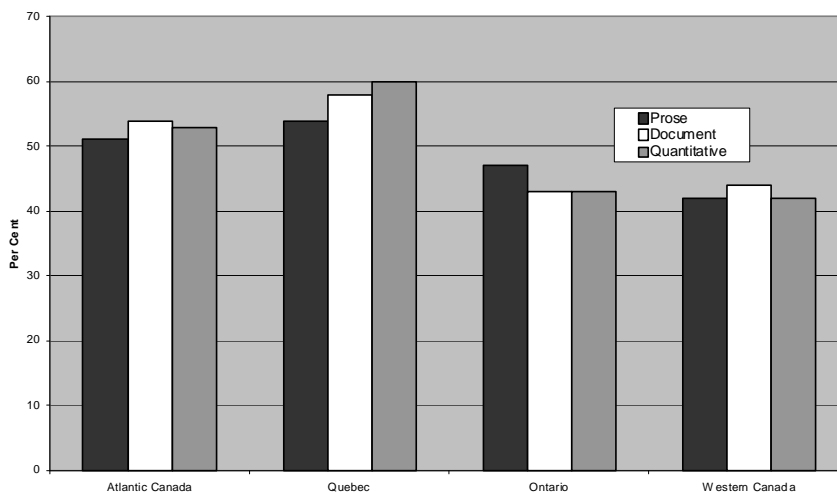
¹² OECD, Statistics Canada and the United States National Center for Education Statistics, *Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey International Planning Report*, Draft, February 8, 2001.

document and quantitative literacy, Canada ranked eighth and ninth respectively. Canada ranked second to Sweden in terms of having the second-largest proportion of the population at the very highest literacy levels.¹³

Although the IALS data are almost a decade old, the results indicate that in 1994 almost one-half of the Canadian population 16 years of age and older had low literacy skills (i.e., Levels 1 and 2) in all three literacy domains, a level of literacy proficiency that is considered in many countries to be below that required to successfully participate fully in society.¹⁴ In terms of gender, 50% of men and 45% of women had low prose literacy skills in 1994, while 49% of women and 47% of men had low document literacy skills. One-half of women 16 years of age and over had low quantitative literacy skills, compared to 46% of men.¹⁵

Despite our success in attracting immigrants with high education and literacy skills to this country, the IALS data also show that Canada has a large share of foreign-born individuals with low literacy skills compared to the domestic-born population. Some 45% of domestic-born individuals 16 years of age and over had low prose literacy skills in 1994, compared to 59% of foreign-born individuals. In terms of low document literacy skills, the domestic-born and foreign-born shares of the covered population were 45% and 57% respectively. Similarly, 47% of domestic-born individuals 16 years of age and over had low quantitative literacy skills, compared to 52% among the foreign-born.¹⁶

CHART 1 - Distribution of Low Literacy Skills by Region



Source: Statistics Canada, *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*, 1996, p. 20; and the Parliamentary Research Branch, Library of Parliament.

¹³ National Literacy Secretariat, *International Literacy Day: A Snapshot of Literacy in Canada* (see <http://www.nald.ca/nls/nlsild/fact3.htm>).

¹⁴ Ibid.

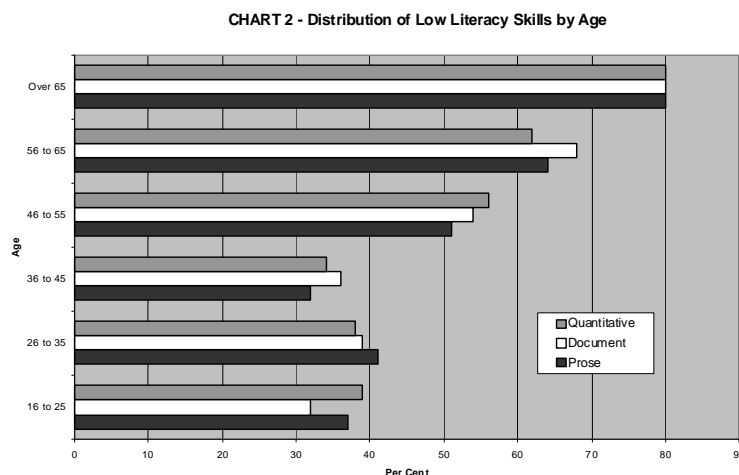
¹⁵ Statistics Canada, *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada* (cat. no. 89-551-XPE), 1996, p. 30.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 36.

As illustrated in Chart 1, the regional distribution of low literacy skills across the country is uneven. According to these data, proportionately more individuals 16 years of age and older in Quebec and Atlantic Canada have low literacy skills, compared to those in Ontario and Western Canada. In 1994, 54% of individuals in Quebec aged 16 and over had low prose literacy skills, while the proportion in Atlantic Canada was 51%. In Ontario, 47% of the population 16 years of age and over ranked in the two lowest levels of prose literacy. In Western Canada, 42% of individuals in this age group had low prose literacy skills. This regional ranking is essentially maintained in terms of both document and quantitative literacy. The only exception pertains to Ontario, which registered the smallest proportion of adults with low document literacy skills.

In terms of individual provinces, Alberta registered the smallest proportion of adults with low literacy skills for all three literacy domains. New Brunswick recorded the highest proportion of adults with low prose literacy skills, while Prince Edward Island had the highest proportion of adults with low document literacy skills. Newfoundland and Quebec had the highest proportions of adults with low quantitative literacy skills.¹⁷

There is little doubt that age and literacy skills are inversely related, as exhibited in Chart 2. The youngest and most recent school-leaving segment of the population 16 years of age and over had the lowest proportion of individuals with low literacy skills for all three literacy domains in 1994. As shown in this chart, the proportion of the population with low literacy skills increases generally with age, with those 65 years of age and over registering the highest proportion of individuals with low literacy skills. In view of the fact that literacy skills and education are positively related, this result is to be expected, since older Canadians are generally less educated than their younger counterparts. Moreover, literacy skills can depreciate with age.



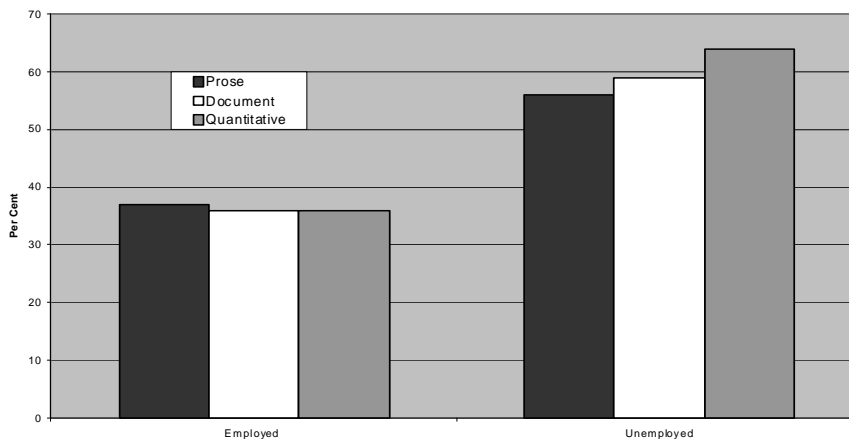
Source: Statistics Canada, *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*, 1996, p. 37; and the Parliamentary Research Branch, Library of Parliament.

¹⁷ Based on unpublished data provided by Statistics Canada. It should be noted that the small sample sizes associated with some provincial estimates, especially in smaller provinces, are somewhat unreliable and should be interpreted with caution.

Another characteristic closely associated with literacy and education is language. Access to a secondary school education in French outside of Quebec was limited prior to the 1960s. Since many French-speaking Canadians did not study in their mother tongue, the IALS provided respondents with a choice as to which official language they preferred to be tested in. According to the IALS, roughly 45% of those whose literacy skills were tested in English had low literacy skills in all three literacy domains. This compares favourably to those who were tested in French, especially those who resided outside of Quebec. The proportion of the population with low literacy skills who were tested in French was 9, 13 and 16 percentage points higher than their English counterparts for prose, document and quantitative literacy respectively. However, once differences in educational attainment are taken into account, these gaps (at least in terms of prose literacy skills) are largely eliminated.¹⁸

As expected, literacy skills play a large role in determining labour market outcomes. Chart 3 shows that individuals with low literacy skills comprise the smallest share (roughly 36%) of employment, but the largest share of unemployment. In view of the fact that employment growth is highest in high skill/high literacy occupations, it is not surprising that unemployment is most common among individuals with low literacy skills. According to the data in Chart 3, more than 50% of unemployed individuals in 1994 had low literacy skills. Given the link between literacy and unemployment, it is understandable that the IALS data identified a large proportion of individuals with low literacy skills using publicly funded income support programs. This is especially evident in the case of social assistance, as at least 65% of recipients had low literacy skills.¹⁹

CHART 3 - Labour Force Status of Workers With Low Literacy Skills



Source: Statistics Canada, *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*, 1996; p.46; and the Parliamentary Research Branch, Library of Parliament.

¹⁸ Statistics Canada (1996), p. 32.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

In Canada, people at level one have an almost 60% chance of being unemployed at some time during the year. At level five, at the highest skill levels, there's a vanishing small probability of being unemployed. So the first effect that literacy has is that employers use it as a sorting mechanism to decide who gets employment. **(Scott Murray, Director General, Institutions and Social Statistics, Statistics Canada)**²⁰

Given the association between literacy skills and labour market status, it follows that literacy skills and earning are also related. In fact, the Committee was told that of the 20 countries participating in the IALS, the relationship between literacy proficiency and earnings was strongest in Canada; literacy proficiency explains about 33% of the variability in wages in Canada.²¹

The Committee was told that Statistics Canada is currently conducting a follow-up to the IALS, called the *International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS)*.²² Members are pleased to know that the sample size in this survey will be much larger in Canada than it was in 1994. With a larger sample, Statistics Canada will be able to look at the distribution of skills for a variety of socio-economic status groups, including Aboriginal people, and allow for minority linguistic profiles. In addition, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and the Yukon will be included in the IALSS. Also of significance, this survey will permit policy-makers to identify whether the distribution of literacy skills in Canada has appreciably changed since 1994. Unfortunately, the data from this survey will not be available until next December.

²⁰ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:50), Meeting No. 17, 18 March 2003.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Outside of Canada this survey is called the *Adult Literacy and Lifeskills (ALL) Survey*.

CHAPTER 2 — TIME FOR LEADERSHIP

The results of the International *Adult Literacy Survey* were both surprising and a signal to many participating countries that a serious problem exists. Convinced that policy inertia will only result in larger problems in the years ahead, a number of countries have introduced policies to combat low literacy levels within their respective populations.

For example, in 1998 the United States consolidated more than 50 employment, training and literacy programs under the *Workforce Investment Act*. Among other things, this Act facilitates investments in adult education and family literacy; promotes collaboration between literacy providers and other education agencies; and emphasizes one-stop delivery systems that give participants access to a wide range of programs and services. The *Workforce Investment Act* establishes three goals for adult education and literacy: (1) to assist adults in becoming literate and obtaining the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency; (2) to assist adults who are parents in obtaining the educational skills required to become full partners in the educational development of their children; and (3) to assist adults in completing high school or the equivalent.²³

The Committee was also informed that Norway initiated steps in 1996 to give adults the right to primary, lower and upper secondary education. A national action plan for adult and continuing education was published in 2000. In 1999, Australia's education ministers declared that Australia's future depends on each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills for a productive and rewarding life. In August 2002, Australia's state, territory and Commonwealth ministers responsible for adult community education endorsed four goals and a range of strategies to guide the future development of adult community education in that country. The four goals are to expand and sustain innovative community-based learning models, raise awareness and understanding of the importance of adult community education, improve the quality of community adult education outcomes, and extend participation in community-based learning.²⁴

One of the most impressive responses to low literacy is England's national literacy strategy — *Skills for Life*. Recognizing the impossibility of reaching its full potential with more than seven million adults with literacy skills equivalent to that of an 11-year old, England embarked on a journey to achieve one of the best adult literacy and numeracy rates in the world. Following the release of the ground-breaking report commissioned in 1998 entitled *A Fresh Start*, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment called on government agencies, employers, trade unions, education providers and the voluntary sector to engage their expertise and commitment to help tackle England's basic skills

²³ National Institute for Literacy (<http://www.nifl.gov/nifl/policy/updates/98-09-23.html>).

²⁴ Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Ministerial Declaration on Adult Community Education, August 2002, p. 4.

problem. Every adult who is improving his or her literacy skills will be given support and the training is free. The government's initial aim is to allocate £1.5 billion to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of 750,000 adults by 2004.²⁵

On more than one occasion the Committee was told that Canada was one of a few OECD countries without a national response to low literacy. Some members of the Committee question this view, given more than a decade of federal literacy initiatives, some in partnership with provincial/territorial governments, directed at the problem of low literacy in this country. Nevertheless, we do agree with our witnesses that the prevalence of low literacy skills in Canada continues to be a nation-wide problem requiring a nation-wide response that is more coordinated and effective than our current efforts, and that entails more resources to enhance our capacity to address this very important problem.

The lack of consistent and adequate funding, vision, strategy, and co-ordination has meant that literacy needs have tended to "fall through the cracks." Less than 10% of Canadians who could benefit from literacy programs are receiving training.²⁶

I. STRENGTHENING FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL LITERACY PARTNERSHIPS: A PAN-CANADIAN ACCORD ON LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Like many of our witnesses, members of the Committee are puzzled as to why Canada's low literacy skills problem has received a somewhat muted public sector response, given our knowledge of the extent of the problem and the costs associated with it. Today, it is widely recognized that technological change is reshaping the way we live and work, and investments in human capital are accepted by virtually everyone as being critical to the continued improvement in the economic and social well-being of Canadians. Public discussions regarding investments in human capital, however, tend to focus on investments in higher learning. While investments in post-secondary education are absolutely critical to the Canadian economy, investments in literacy and other essential skills are also very important.²⁷ Without these foundation skills, individuals are extremely limited not only in terms of their ability to learn, but also in their ability to function fully in society. Moreover, given the economic costs associated with low literacy skills, society loses too.

²⁵ Department of Education and Skills, *Skills for Life: The National Literacy Strategy for Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy Skills* (http://www.dfes.gov.uk/readwriteplus/bank/ABS_Strategy_Doc_Final.pdf).

²⁶ Movement for Canadian Literacy, *Strengthening Our Literacy Foundation Is Key To Canada's Future*, Brief, April 2003, p. 6.

²⁷ Essential skills are enabling skills that help individuals perform the tasks required at work and in daily living. They are the foundation skills required to learn higher skills and thus improve workers' abilities to adapt to changes in the workplace. Our report deals primarily with categories of literacy — prose literacy, document literacy and numeracy. In addition to these, essential skills also include writing, oral communication, thinking skills, working with others, computer use and continuous learning. Human Resources Development Canada has profiled essential skills for some 180 occupations, 150 of which can be entered with a high school education or less.

I am now able to understand instructions, directions, labels, and signs. I am now able to make important daily decisions that can greatly affect the quality of life for me and my family. I am able to be a full participant in society. I feel more like a citizen and a part of this democracy and the democratic process where I never felt a part before. I am now more informed and am able to make decisions based on choices that I never had prior to getting an education.²⁸

In Canada, as in many parts of the world, basic education is compulsory up to a certain age. Primary and secondary schooling are free, a recognition that the literacy and numeracy skills imparted between kindergarten and the end of high school are crucial to our social and economic welfare. Taxpayers have agreed to finance this educational system because this investment provides economic benefits to both learners and society at large. Evidence underlying this belief surfaced on several occasions during our hearings. For example, we were reminded of the 1987 findings, albeit dated, of the Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy, which highlighted several areas where the cost of low literacy skills was significant; these include industrial accidents; lost productivity, wages and profits; unemployment; social assistance; and incarceration. While the accuracy of the Task Force's estimated cost of Canada's literacy problem should be treated cautiously, a figure of at least \$2 billion was regarded as a reasonable estimate, with the caveat that it could also be much higher.²⁹ Some of our witnesses also spoke of the relationship between health costs and low literacy skills (e.g., inability to properly interpret drug prescription instructions). We were told that, based on a study by the American Medical Association, the average health care costs among individuals with low literacy skills were more than four times higher than among the general population.³⁰ We were also told that offenders who raised their literacy skills while in Canada's correctional service system had lower rates of readmission. For example, we were told that offenders who completed Adult Basic Education-8 and -10 before being released on full parole had respectively a 7% and 21% reduction in readmissions compared to the general offender population released on full parole after two years.³¹ Obviously, this translates into lower judicial and correctional service costs to society.³² In addition to higher profits for firms, learners also realize higher earnings as a consequence of

²⁸ Learners Advisory Network for the Movement for Canadian Literacy, Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, April 2003.

²⁹ Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy, *The Cost of Illiteracy to Business in Canada*, prepared by Woods Gordon Management Consultants, October 1987, p. 2.

³⁰ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:45), Meeting No. 12, 11 February 2003.

³¹ The evidence presented to the Committee is based on *A Two-Year Release Follow-Up of Federal Offenders who Participated in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program* by Roger Boe of Correctional Service Canada (CSC); Boe compared a sample of offenders to the sample used in an earlier study, *Inmates Referred for Detention (1989-90 to 1993-94)* by Brian A. Grant, also of CSC. Both studies are available on-line on CSC's Web site at http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/rsrch/reports/reports_e.shtml. The issue of literacy among offenders is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 of our report.

³² HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:25), Meeting No. 25, 29 April 2003.

investments in literacy skills training; it is estimated that each additional year of education raises an individual's annual earnings by some 8.3%, of which approximately one-third is attributed to improved literacy skills.³³

The Committee is convinced that the private and social costs of low literacy (and other essential skills) are high and will continue to grow if this country fails to respond adequately to this very important problem. We have the infrastructure, the resources and the knowledge to significantly raise the level of literacy skills in Canada. What seems to be lacking, however, is the political will to seriously address this problem. We need leadership to coordinate and deliver a nation-wide response to this issue, and government must provide this leadership.

Although education falls within the constitutional purview of the provinces and territories, the prevalence of low literacy in Canada is a national problem and, in this context, the federal government has a role to play. However, this role must respect provincial/territorial constitutional authority and all relevant agreements currently in force. Such agreements include, for example, *A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians*, a federal/provincial/territorial agreement to promote, among other things, the full and active participation of all Canadians in Canada's social and economic life. Since reaching this agreement in February 1999, federal and provincial/territorial governments have worked together and taken action in a number of areas, including early childhood development and housing. The Committee shares the view held by several witnesses that these agreements serve as a good model for a rejuvenated and enlarged federal/provincial/territorial response to literacy and numeracy skills development. Since an agreement on literacy and numeracy skills development must recognize the constitutional predominance of the provinces and territories, use of the federal government's spending power must reflect this reality.

Each region of the country has unique literacy needs. Flexibility is needed to respond to provincial/territorial priorities, and these differences must be accommodated in a federal/provincial/territorial agreement. To some extent, existing program structures already incorporate regional flexibility, and these could be bolstered. For example, regional priorities and a strong provincial/territorial voice are already instilled in the National Literacy Secretariat's Federal/Provincial/Territorial Funding Stream. In addition, Labour Market Development Agreements accommodate provincial/territorial labour market priorities. In our opinion, these agreements offer a great deal of potential for addressing workplace literacy.

Many witnesses indicated that setting goals and establishing accountability mechanisms are critical components of a successful approach for raising Canada's low literacy levels. The Committee is in total agreement with this view. However, before we set goals we must establish what can be done within a given budget. The Committee does not support the approach that was recently adopted in the federal discussion paper

³³ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:30), Meeting No. 26, 1 May 2003.

entitled *Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians*, in which one of the proposed milestones for measuring success in ensuring that Canada's current and emerging workforce is more highly skilled and adaptable is to reduce by 25% the number of adult Canadians with low literacy skills over the next decade. As far as we can ascertain, the cost of meeting this target is unknown and, in the opinion of some members, this is questionable policy. An agreement on literacy and numeracy skills must establish realistic goals, and we must be able to assess whether these goals have been met in a specified period of time. In other words, we must have an effective means for measuring performance. Accountability and transparency are critical components of *A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians*, and we encourage as broad a consultation as possible with literacy stakeholders to identify goals and performance measures.

Finally, given the prevalence of low literacy skills in Canada, we recognize that the problem will require a substantial amount of financial resources and take many years to resolve. We suggest that the federal government add markedly to the investments already being made to address the problem of low literacy, particularly in certain areas where more significant investment is needed as identified by the IALS; that, where appropriate, some of this additional spending be conditional on incremental investments by the provinces and territories; and that federal funding be sustained for a period of at least 10 years. A federal/provincial/territorial agreement on literacy and numeracy skills development should be reviewed every five years.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Minister of Human Resources Development Canada meet with provincial/territorial ministers of education and labour market ministers to develop a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development. Key elements of this accord should identify provinces and territories as having primary responsibility for education and labour market training, establish joint funding levels and funding duration, determine the means of delivery, set goals, identify the need for flexibility in establishing literacy priorities, and establish methods for evaluating outcomes. If a pan-Canadian accord is not possible, the Government of Canada should negotiate bilateral literacy accords with all interested provincial and territorial governments. [Note: The reference to a pan-Canadian accord is intended to mean that the federal government should try to reach unanimous agreement with the provinces and territories to address this nation's serious low literacy skills problem. If unanimous agreement is not possible, the Committee encourages the federal government to work with individual provinces and territories to achieve the same results. In either case, since this issue falls within the constitutional domain of the provinces and territories, an agreement is required to formalize federal support.]

II. MAKING FEDERAL LITERACY POLICY MORE COHERENT

The Committee was constantly reminded that literacy's long arm reaches the mandates of many federal departments including, for example, Canadian Heritage, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Communication Canada, Correctional Service Canada, Health Canada, Industry Canada, Justice Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and, of course, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). Even though all federal departments and agencies are involved with literacy either directly or indirectly as government service providers, there does not appear to be a government-wide policy pertaining to this issue. Nor does there appear to be a government-wide inventory of literacy-specific programs and expenditures, let alone an overall sense as to the effectiveness of these measures.

The federal government can audit departments of the federal government and produce an inventory of programs and policies that currently affect literacy. There are a large number of them. There is money being spent in many other places, besides the National Literacy Secretariat, where literacy is involved or embedded, but nobody has an inventory or an overview of what those are, so there certainly could be an audit done. It's a horizontal issue that cuts across government departments, but no one can currently identify all the places where it has been embedded in policy, let alone the places where it needs to be embedded in future policy. **(Linda Shohet, Executive Director, Centre for Literacy of Quebec)**³⁴

Many witnesses felt that the federal government should, as a common practice, assess all of its major policies and programs to ensure that these respect a government-wide literacy policy, once defined. In other words, existing and emerging federal policies and programs would be reviewed through a "literacy lens" to ensure coherency vis-à-vis federal literacy policy.

The committee should recommend that key federal government departments and policies be reviewed through a literacy lens. By this I mean that across departments, federal programs and policies should be examined and adapted to ensure that they support literacy ... For example, while the national children's agenda did not explicitly include family literacy as part of its objectives, it certainly could have. **(Cate Sills, Executive Director, Northwest Territories Literacy Council)**³⁵

One literacy assessment-related issue that received a great deal of attention during our hearings was the absence of the use of plain language in federal laws, communications and services. Probably the most startling example of how low literacy individuals might be ill-served by the absence of plain language is the criminal justice system. We were told that legal proceedings do not, as a general rule, take into account

³⁴ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:45), Meeting No. 11, 6 February 2003.

³⁵ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:35), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

the fact that many victims, witnesses and accused have low literacy skills. Our justice system presumes both innocence and high levels of literacy, which in the latter case is obviously erroneous, as discussed later in our report.

With young offenders, the most frequent criminal offence is “failure to comply.” They do not appear for hearings or appointments with probation officers or before the court. For those who cannot read their orders or tell the time, non-compliance is almost inevitable. They mask their difficulty with indifference ... What starts out as a problem of illiteracy comes to be seen as being the problem of an uncooperative or antisocial person. They are at risk of being drawn further into the system. The possibility of imprisonment escalates quickly for them.³⁶

Another example of a potential problem related to the absence of plain language, and also the subject of a recent report by our Committee (*The Guaranteed Income Supplement: The Duty to Reach All*), is the under-subscription problem pertaining to the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). During our study of this problem, the Committee was told that there were around 275,000 GIS-eligible individuals who did not receive these payments. As this estimate is based only on individuals who filed a tax return, in reality the actual number of under-subscribers is not known. One of the reasons cited for the under-subscription problem is that there are many elderly people who are unable to read and understand HRDC’s communication and application materials pertaining to this income support program. The Committee is pleased that HRDC is taking action to deal with this problem, but notes that many federal programs and services overlook or ignore the problem of low literacy in Canadian society, despite its prevalence as clearly illustrated in the previous chapter of this report.

Modernization in the delivery of federal programs and services, particularly online initiatives, is another area that was discussed during our hearings. In this instance, the issue extends beyond the traditional bounds of literacy to computer literacy as well as access to this technology (i.e., the digital divide). Nonetheless, as the Government of Canada is committed to being the most electronically connected government in the world by 2005, we must ensure that most Canadian citizens have access to a computer and have the necessary literacy skills to benefit from the use of such technology. This is discussed later on in our report.

In February 2003, the government introduced legislation to modernize the Public Service of Canada. Part of this initiative is to establish more coherent training and learning to help employees pursue professional development and meet the corporate needs of the public service. Unfortunately, this so-called coherent human capital package fails to include literacy and numeracy skills development. In concert with this proposal, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat recently released *A Policy for Continuous Learning*

³⁶ Graham Stewart, The John Howard Society of Canada, *Submission to the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities Regarding Workplace Literacy/Justice and Literacy*, April 2003, p. 2 and 3.

*in the Public Service of Canada.*³⁷ This policy also affords silent treatment to literacy and numeracy skills. In our opinion, building a public service-wide learning culture necessarily entails a focus on individuals' learning abilities and needs.

We are aware that current hiring practices in the federal public service tend to recruit highly educated people; however, the fact remains that as in the workforce in general, there are many federal workers who left the educational system many years ago with low levels of education and have jobs that do not require extensive use of literacy skills. These workers, like all others, are subject to the same literacy skill depreciation effects of the "use it or lose it" variety. And like all federal public service workers with high literacy skills, workers with low literacy skills should be accommodated in the Treasury Board Secretariat's policy on continuous learning.

While the National Literacy Secretariat may be the voice of literacy in the federal government, there does not appear to be a lead federal presence to oversee, advise and inform on government-wide literacy matters. In fact, the Committee believes that if the federal government is going to take a leadership role with respect to this issue, literacy issues need to be given considerably more prominence at the federal level. For example, we need to know more about the connection between health outcomes and literacy. Health Canada and all other federal departments need to ensure that literacy issues are afforded the prominence they deserve. One avenue for achieving this is an annual federal report on literacy.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that:

- **The federal government formulate a literacy policy applicable to all federal departments and agencies, establish clear program objectives and goals, and conduct a government-wide inventory and review of literacy-specific programs to ensure that program objectives and outcomes are being achieved;**
- **The federal government assess all government programs and services to ensure that the government's literacy policy and goals are being met (i.e., literacy lens) and that programs and services are accessible to individuals with low literacy skills;**
- **Treasury Board specifically include literacy and numeracy skills development in its *Policy for Continuous Learning in the Public Service of Canada*. Furthermore, all employees with low literacy skills, irrespective of their employment status, be assisted and**

³⁷ See http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pubs-pol/hrpubs/TB_856/pclpsc-pacfp1_e.asp.

encouraged to submit a personal learning plan to raise their literacy and numeracy skills. Moreover, learning opportunities should be made available during working hours;

- **The federal government assign primary responsibility to the National Literacy Secretariat to coordinate, monitor and report on federal literacy initiatives and their results.**

CHAPTER 3 — COMPONENTS OF A FEDERAL CONTRIBUTION TO PAN-CANADIAN LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

I. RECOGNIZING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR, EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVES AND LEARNERS

Members of the Committee are extremely impressed by the dedication and commitment demonstrated by all the groups and individuals who appeared before us and shared their knowledge, views and insights on Canada's literacy problems and solutions. We are also very appreciative of the vast volunteer network that exists across this country and whose sole purpose is to identify literacy needs and raise the literacy skills of Canadians. This literacy community has helped to bolster Canada's economic and social fortunes for decades. However, we fear that this contribution is often taken for granted. We need to recognize in more tangible ways (in addition to increased funding) the valuable work performed by the voluntary sector to address Canada's low literacy problem.

Our literacy program is almost entirely done with volunteers ... [w]e use 800 volunteers across our agency, and we're not alone; you folks are well aware of the leverage in the voluntary sector ... situating things like a lifelong learning centre in high-risk, high-need areas attached to the voluntary sector does two things. It leverages the volunteers and it overcomes the problem raised earlier about outreach, something voluntary sector organizations are very good at. We have lots of human resources with our volunteers. We're extremely good at going out and finding people. And if you have a successful voluntary sector organization, it's an easier place to come for help with things like literacy. **(Susan Pigott, Chief Executive Officer, St. Christopher House)**³⁸

Today we [Frontier College] still work across Canada and we still fight isolation and poverty through the power of literacy and learning. We have 6,000 volunteers, most of whom are still university students. But we work in today's frontiers, which are prisons, shelters for homeless people, and workplaces that include farms in rural Canada and factories in urban Canada. We do a lot of teaching of people with disabilities, which I know is a concern of this committee, and we do a lot of work with senior citizens. **(John O'Leary, President, Frontier College)**³⁹

There are thousands of Canadians volunteering in literacy work every day in this country ... [f]or example, 74 volunteer tutor programs serve 80 communities in Alberta. **(Eliane Cairns, Vice-President, Literacy Alberta)**⁴⁰

³⁸ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:35), Meeting No. 11, 6 February 2003.

³⁹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:15), Meeting No. 12, 11 February 2003.

⁴⁰ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:25), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

I want to emphasize that there's a whole host of volunteers out there that are too often not recognized. These volunteers are doing tremendous jobs. They're not out there making a noise and being heard, but they have to be recognized.
(Ian Thorne, National Literacy Project, Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada, New Brunswick Coalition for Literacy)⁴¹

Employers and employee representatives who initiate workplace literacy initiatives must also be recognized for their contribution to improving literacy skills in the workplace. These initiatives, discussed in more detail later in our report, can have a positive impact in areas such as production, wages, workplace health and safety, and union participation. Furthermore, workplace literacy can have positive intergenerational literacy effects; as workers become more literate, they can become bigger contributors to literacy within their families.

In 1990, Canada Post adopted literacy as its main philanthropic cause. In 1993, it introduced a national awards program and with the help of many sponsors, including the National Literacy Secretariat, the awards program has grown. In 2002, Canada Post celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Canada Post Literacy Awards, recognizing 34 winners from all regions of the country for individual achievement, community leadership, education and business leadership. Winners in the individual achievement and educators categories received a personal computer, while winners in the community leadership category won \$2,000.⁴² The Conference Board of Canada's Awards for Excellence in Workplace Literacy, also sponsored by the National Literacy Secretariat, are intended to raise awareness of the value of workplace literacy and reward effective initiatives that raise the literacy skills of employees. An award is presented annually to a small business, a medium-sized business and a large business.⁴³

The Committee commends Canada Post and the Conference Board of Canada for the literacy awards programs that they and others have supported over the years. Nevertheless, the Committee maintains that more must be done to raise awareness of the issue of low literacy, and to encourage and support the valuable contribution of literacy advocates and providers. Learners too need encouragement and support to initiate and continue their learning.

⁴¹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (17:20), Meeting No. 19, 25 March 2003.

⁴² See <http://www.kingstonliteracy.com/canada%20post.htm>.

⁴³ See <http://www.nald.ca/AWARDS/National/natawrds/excellen.htm>.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the federal government allocate sufficient resources to provide literacy awards at various points in the year, especially International Literacy Day, to reward literacy providers (e.g., volunteers, employers and other literacy stakeholders) for their significant involvement and excellence in promoting and delivering literacy training, and to celebrate the successes of literacy learners.

II. THE ROLE OF THE CANADIAN LEARNING INSTITUTE

At the National Summit on Innovation and Learning in November 2002, the government announced that it intended to establish a new organization, called the Canadian Learning Institute (CLI), to enhance our knowledge and information about learning. In January 2003, the Minister of Human Resources Development Canada asked Dr. Benjamin Levin of the University of Manitoba and Shirley Seward of the Canadian Labour and Business Centre to consult with the provinces and territories, national learning organizations, and business and labour organizations regarding the structure, mandate and governance of this organization. Apparently, these consultations are completed and the Minister was reviewing this matter while we were preparing our report. In the February 2003 budget, the federal government announced a one-time contribution of \$100 million to the CLI in 2003-2004.

In the initial announcement, the CLI's mandate was to ensure that Canadians have access to objective research on the effectiveness of investments in skills and learning. It was also envisaged that the CLI would support the testing and evaluation of innovative approaches to learning, and would coordinate this information so as not to duplicate or overlap any ongoing activities of governments or third-party organizations. Some members of the Committee are concerned about the role of this organization, and stress that its mandate must not interfere with the mandates of any similar entities supported by provincial and territorial governments. For example, care should be taken to ensure that the CLI's research agenda does not overlap with that of the Canadian Education Statistics Council, a partnership between Statistics Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. The same concern applies to federally sponsored research on literacy. For example, we do not envisage a mandate that would include literacy and young children, as this is already the focus of the Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, one of the government's networks of centres of excellence.

Many of our witnesses maintained that the CLI's mandate should include research on literacy. Provided our concerns expressed above are addressed we support this view, given that literacy skills are critical to all learning. In terms of the CLI's literacy-related mandate, consideration should be given to incorporating research on adult literacy issues that have a direct application to literacy programs, research that addresses literacy training for specific populations or sectors of the economy, and research that identifies ways to help prevent or minimize literacy problems or improve adult literacy. Several research areas were highlighted during the Committee's hearings, such as establishing a better understanding of why adults have low literacy skills (especially those at Level 1); developing a better understanding of the process of becoming literate and the role of institutions such as libraries in this process; assessing the literacy needs of Aboriginal people, persons with disabilities and inmates; and establishing a better understanding of why the vast majority of adults with low literacy skills do not participate in learning.

In my presentation, I mentioned three methods or procedures that have been used with francophones [to improve literacy skills] ... Currently, given the resources available to the stakeholders, we can experiment with these methods, but we can rarely make a systematic evaluation of them ... we discussed the Canadian Learning Institute, whose mandate is to get an overview of various methods and see what can be done. I hope that an institute of this kind takes an interest in these practices, so as to yield practical results for the stakeholders. **(Luce Lapierre, Executive Director, Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français)**⁴⁴

Let's turn to the newly announced Canadian Institute of Learning. We'd like you to ensure that it dedicates at least 25% of its resources to analyzing proven successes in adult and family literacy ... the institute should not narrow its focus on post-secondary education alone. **(Marg Rose, Executive Director, Literacy Partners of Manitoba)**⁴⁵

The new Canadian Learning Institute that's been established by the federal government is a perfect example of where integration would work. Literacy should be a key focus of the institute. **(Sue Folinsbee, Co-Executive Director, Ontario Literacy Coalition)**⁴⁶

CLA recommends that a better understanding of the process of becoming literate and the role of respective social institutions such as libraries become part of its mandate. **(Madeleine Lefebvre, Vice-President, Canadian Library Association)**⁴⁷

⁴⁴ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:55), Meeting No. 12, 11 February 2003.

⁴⁵ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:35), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

⁴⁶ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:05), Meeting No. 19, 25 March 2003.

⁴⁷ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:50), Meeting No. 24, 10 April 2003.

In 2002-2003, the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) devoted about 11% of its grants and contributions budget to research. With the advent of the CLI, the Committee believes that at least some (i.e., excluding research on needs assessment and innovative literacy programs) of the literacy research undertaken through the NLS could be redirected to the CLI. Moreover, this would permit some of the NLS's research budget to be reallocated to building more strategic literacy partnerships, an area of NLS excellence as evidenced by testimony from literacy providers.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the federal government include literacy research in the mandate of the Canadian Learning Institute. It is the Committee's view that the assignment of literacy research activities to the Canadian Learning Institute should not reduce the National Literacy Secretariat's annual budget for grants and contribution programs.

III. ASSESSING PRIOR LEARNING AND RESURRECTING THE CONCEPT OF A LEARNING PASSPORT

Several witnesses noted the need to recognize learners' formal and informal knowledge and skills, and to develop a means of recording this human capital. In terms of the latter, one idea cited was a digital learning record.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) serves to identify skills, knowledge and abilities that have been acquired through formal recognized learning, the workplace, volunteer work and a myriad of other activities. PLA helps learners identify their strengths and abilities and recognize their learning accomplishments. Unfortunately, a great deal of prior learning goes unrecognized. According to a recent study, it is estimated that roughly 540,000 individuals in the Canadian labour market forego an average of some \$8,000 to \$12,000 each year because some portion of their formally and informally acquired human capital is not recognized. Such learning could be recognized and remunerated if we had a better system for doing so.⁴⁸ This problem is particularly serious in terms of unrecognized foreign credentials, a point that was often made during our review of the *Employment Equity Act* last year and that surfaced again during our study on literacy.

In October 2002, more than 100 individuals participated in the National Best Practices Workshop on Building Community Capacity to Recognize Learning. These participants maintained that the formal and informal learning opportunities of all Canadians must count if we are to create, sustain and support a knowledgeable and skilled workforce. A lack of affordable Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

⁴⁸ M. Bloom and M. Grant, *Brain Gain: The Economic Benefits of Recognizing Learning and Learning Credentials in Canada*, Conference Board of Canada, 2001, p. 29.

(PLAR) practices, insufficient assessment tools and inadequate understanding of processes such as portfolio development were identified as some of the factors inhibiting the development of PLAR in this country.⁴⁹

During our hearings we were told about a PLAR literacy project, now in its third year, that involves five literacy networks in the Halifax region. This project has adapted PLAR to help develop learning portfolios for literacy learners. According to the evaluation results of the Learning Portfolio Program, a learning portfolio provides participants with greater confidence and self-esteem, and thus helps learners in their education, training and career prospects. Evidence also suggests that the Learning Portfolio Program motivates participants to engage in lifelong learning, especially in the case of those who have not previously participated in education and training.⁵⁰ Hence, a learning portfolio might help to overcome some of the stigma associated with low literacy and encourage more individuals to participate in literacy training.

So we talk in this country about a skills shortage, people who can't read and write and people who don't have skills for certain occupations, when we don't even know what people can do. So it's easy to switch gears here and say, let's do an inventory of the skills and knowledge individuals and communities and whole industries have in them and build on that. The method by which to manage that is human capital accounting, using something like a digital learning record, the opportunity to first assess where we are at, plan for it, and manage it. A place to begin to create that learning record might be the IALS survey, because it does describe some of the categories of literacy. But then we have all sorts of other data at Human Resources Development Canada about various skills required for all sorts of occupations. We have the measures. **(Kathryn Barker, President, FuturEd Consulting Education Futurists Inc.)**⁵¹

The basic principle of RPL [recognizing prior learning] is that it doesn't matter where or how you learn something. If you can identify that learning, articulate it, present it and present documentation or evidence for it, it's real and serious learning. It should be recognized, respected and celebrated... We are now engaged in the third year of a major literacy PLAR project with five literacy networks in the Halifax region where we have provided professional development for facilitators and tutors, we've adapted the materials that we use for prior learning and a learning portfolio, and we are now rolling that out through those learning literacy networks to a variety of participants. Already the tutors are noticing marked and dramatic improvements in the confidence of the participants, and in their communication skills. **(Doug Myers, Executive Director of the Prior Learning Assessment Centre in Halifax; and Director of Priority Assessment, Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment)**⁵²

⁴⁹ See <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/sp-ps/sl-ca/events-activites/summary-resume/learning.shtml>.

⁵⁰ Halifax Prior Learning Assessment Centre, *The Learning Portfolio Program Impact Evaluation Study*, (Executive Summary), October 2002.

⁵¹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:05), Meeting No. 11, 6 February 2003.

⁵² HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:40), Meeting No. 24, 10 April 2003.

In 1994, the federal government proposed that a Learning Passport be developed, in partnership with the provinces and territories.⁵³ The intent of this document was to record individuals' learning experiences and their academic and vocational credentials, and thereby facilitate smoother transitions in a learning environment and the workplace. This concept needs to be resurrected and acted on.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that funds be allocated through the National Literacy Secretariat to encourage greater use of prior learning assessments for low literacy learners.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the federal government work with provincial and territorial governments and the learning community to develop a format for a learning portfolio that records individuals' formal and informal learning, and that respects the privacy of individuals. It is hoped that this document would identify learners' strengths and knowledge gaps, and provide a basis on which to build for those who engage in further learning. Although this recommendation is primarily intended to encourage and facilitate training among individuals with low literacy credentials, there is no reason to limit the use of this credential recognition document to low literacy learners. In fact, an obvious extension of this approach could include the learning accomplishments, including language instruction, of newcomers to Canada.

⁵³ Government of Canada, *Improving Social Security in Canada: A Discussion Paper*, October 1994, pp. 66-67.

IV. DESIGNING AN ABORIGINAL STRATEGY

1. Aboriginal Communities — Education and Literacy

Aboriginal peoples⁵⁴ in Canada face numerous challenges in the areas of education and literacy that are unique to them as a population and as a culture. Statistics show that Aboriginal peoples are likely to have lower levels of educational participation and achievement than the average Canadian.⁵⁵ They also experience much lower rates of labour force participation and are more likely to be employed in low-skilled occupations or to be unemployed.

Aboriginal peoples, however, represent a critical potential labour force resource for meeting the needs of the Canadian economy in the next decade. A large cohort of Aboriginal youth will enter the workforce at almost the same time as a projected shortage of overall labour. By 2006, the Aboriginal working age population is projected to reach 920,000. According to the Conference Board of Canada, maximizing Aboriginal employment could help address future labour shortages while supporting the sustainability of pension and employment insurance programs.⁵⁶ The Committee believes that enhancing the literacy skills of Aboriginal learners of all ages is an essential step toward maximizing their employment.

⁵⁴ The *Constitution Act, 1982* identifies three groups of Aboriginal peoples: Indians, Inuit and Métis. In addition, the *Indian Act* defines Status Indians, meaning those who are registered under the Act. Canada is home to 641 First Nations communities, consisting of 52 nations or cultural groups speaking more than 50 languages. First Nations peoples living on reserves represent about 61% of the Status Indian population. According to projections prepared by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and the Canadian Polar Commission, using the 2000-based Indian Registry System for the year 2003, there are 445,436 on-reserve Status Indians and 285,139 who do not reside on reserves. The on-reserve Status Indian population is expected to increase by 57.9% from 2003 to 2021, compared with a 12% increase in the Canadian population as a whole. About 40.4% of the Status Indian population is under the age of 19, compared with 25.2% for the Canadian population (see Statistics Canada, “*Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2000-2026*,” Catalogue No. 91-520-XPB, March 2001). There are few reserves in the North. Some 92,300 residents are spread across the vast landmass of the Northwest Territories (37,100 people), Nunavut (26,700 people) and the Yukon (28,500). A little over half of the population in the North is Aboriginal (see INAC and the Canadian Polar Commission, *2003-04 Estimates — Report on Plans and Priorities*, at <http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/est-pre/20032004/pdf/inac-e.pdf>). Métis represented 30% (292,310 individuals) and Inuit about 5% (45,070 individuals) of people who identified themselves as Aboriginal in the 2001 Census. Only 7,315 Métis lived on reserves at the time of the Census (<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/abor/groups2.cfm>).

In our report, the term “Aboriginal peoples” refers to all indigenous peoples, including First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Status and non-Status Indians. In some cases, a specific ethnic group is mentioned.

⁵⁵ Provincial governments are responsible for the education of off-reserve First Nations people, Inuit and Métis. Territorial governments have similar education responsibilities for the people living in their jurisdiction.

⁵⁶ David Greenall and Stelios Loizides, *Aboriginal Digital Opportunities: Addressing Aboriginal Learning Needs Through the Use of Learning Technologies*, Conference Board of Canada, 2001, p. 6.

Education is a key factor in the development of literacy skills and in ensuring that Aboriginal youth entering the workforce will have the necessary qualifications to meet labour market demands.⁵⁷ However, education is a particularly problematic issue in Aboriginal communities. In a 2002 survey of First Nations people living on reserves, “a lack of education was seen as the most important challenge facing Aboriginal children and youth by more than one in three First Nations residents.”⁵⁸ Indian and Northern Affairs Canada’s (INAC) data for 2001 reveal that 63% of First Nations people aged 15 and over living on reserves do not have a high school diploma. According to the 2001 Census, 39% of the working-age Aboriginal population did not have a high school diploma, down from 45% in 1996. The drop-out rate of First Nations people before grade 9 is six times higher than that of the Canadian population.⁵⁹ High drop-out rates contribute to the low proportion of on-reserve First Nations people with at least a high school diploma, resulting in fewer First Nations youth with the skills and attributes increasingly sought by employers. As noted previously in our report, each additional year of education raises annual earnings by about 8%, of which one-third is attributable to increased literacy skills.⁶⁰ This is all the more important when we consider that Aboriginal peoples overall have below-average household incomes. Furthermore, as the Canadian economy becomes more knowledge-intensive, Aboriginal peoples lacking the necessary education and literacy skills to compete in the labour market will be excluded from new economic opportunities and will be pushed even further to the margins of society. The Committee believes this is a situation that warrants immediate, appropriate and effective intervention. In addition, we think that Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, in consultation with First Nations, should initiate steps to ensure that First Nations children receive quality elementary and secondary education.

2. Federal Programs — Aboriginal Education and Literacy

Fourteen federal departments and agencies⁶¹ offer programs for Aboriginal peoples, with total expenditures of approximately \$8.3 billion in 2003-2004. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada is the principal department delivering services to Aboriginal peoples; its core responsibilities relate to First Nations people living on reserves. As well, in Canada’s North, INAC partners with “Inuit and other Aboriginal communities to develop

⁵⁷ HRDC, *Lessons Learned Background Report—Lessons Learned on Employment, Labour Market, and Economic Development Policies, Programs, and Services for Aboriginal Peoples, Evaluation and Data Development, Strategic Policy*, March 1999 (http://www11.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/pls/edd/v_report.a?p_site=EDD&sub=PPSR).

⁵⁸ INAC, *Fall 2002 Survey of First Nations People Living On-Reserve: Final Report*, Survey conducted by Ekos Research Associates Inc. on behalf of INAC, October 2002 (http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/srv/index_e.html).

⁵⁹ Auditor General Denis Desautels, *2000 Report of the Auditor General of Canada*, Chapter 4 — Indian and Northern Affairs Canada — Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of the Auditor General of Canada, April 2000 (http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/domino/reports.nsf/html/00menu_e.html).

⁶⁰ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:30), Meeting No. 26, 1 May 2003.

⁶¹ Indian and Northern Affairs, Health, Human Resources Development, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Fisheries and Oceans, Solicitor General, Canadian Heritage, Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada, Industry, Correctional Service, Natural Resources, Privy Council Office, Justice, and National Defence.

governance structures and to finalize and implement land claims and self-government agreements.”⁶² The federal government also offers programs related to education, labour market development, cultural services, corrections and communications to on-reserve First Nations people.

With respect to programs aimed at enhancing the literacy skills of Aboriginal peoples, the main federal players are INAC, HRDC’s National Literacy Secretariat and Aboriginal Relations Office, and the Department of Canadian Heritage. INAC estimates that it will spend approximately \$1.4 billion on education programs and services for First Nations people living on reserves in 2003-2004: a little over \$1 billion on elementary/secondary education, \$304 million on post-secondary education and \$8.2 million on cultural education centres. Approximately 120,000 elementary/secondary and approximately 26,000 post-secondary First Nations students currently benefit from these services. Almost 60% of students living on reserves are enrolled in over 450 First Nations-managed elementary and secondary schools.⁶³ The National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) funds programs that directly support English and French literacy projects for Aboriginal adults. In 2002-2003, the NLS allocated \$2,073,742 in support of 41 Aboriginal literacy projects currently operating across Canada. The Aboriginal Relations Office (ARO) administers the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy (AHRDS), a five-year, \$1.6 billion program designed to assist Aboriginal peoples prepare for, find and maintain employment. The AHRDS is a community-based partnership strategy that gives responsibility to the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreement (AHRDA) signatories for designing and delivering labour market programming, in exchange for strong accountability and results.⁶⁴ In fiscal year 2001-2002, the AHRDS provided assistance to 50,036 Aboriginal clients at a cost of \$246.4 million. Of these, 5,653 individuals returned to school and 18,732 became employed or self-employed resulting in \$13.8 million in savings to the EI Account.⁶⁵ Finally, the Department of Canadian Heritage funds a range of Aboriginal programs that contribute directly or indirectly to the enhancement of literacy in Aboriginal languages. For example, the Department allocated \$20 million to fund a four-year (1998-2002) initiative to assist Aboriginal communities in revitalizing and maintaining Aboriginal languages. This initiative is currently under review and negotiations for renewal are under way.

⁶² INAC and the Canadian Polar Commission, *2003-04 Estimates — Report on Plans and Priorities* (<http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/est-pre/20032004/pdf/inac-e.pdf>).

⁶³ INAC has delegated its authority to First Nations and the provinces for the design and delivery of education. For more information, see the results of the audit of INAC elementary and secondary education services in the *2000 Report of the Auditor General* (http://www.oag-bvg.gc.ca/domino/reports.nsf/html/00menu_e.html).

⁶⁴ As part of the accountability system, the AHRDS tracks clients, jobs found, and the number of interventions required before employment. While clients may require a number of pre-employment interventions prior to finding employment, the AHRDS does not track the specific nature of the interventions (i.e., literacy, academic upgrading, life skills training, etc.).

⁶⁵ Human Resources Development Canada, *Performance Report for the Period ending March 31, 2002, 2002*, p. 27.

3. Aboriginal Literacy — What Do We Know?

The Committee heard from a number of representatives of Aboriginal organizations, service providers and teachers who raised many key issues related to literacy in Aboriginal communities. We learned that:

- Very little research has looked specifically at literacy levels in Aboriginal communities. Nonetheless, based on the educational achievement of Aboriginal peoples and first-hand experience of service providers, it is estimated that a larger proportion of Aboriginal peoples have lower literacy skills than the average Canadian as per the results of the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey.
- Many Aboriginal people do not relate to current definitions of literacy. For example, oral language is highly valued in Aboriginal culture, as much as if not more than writing and reading. However, learning effective oral communication is not a component of most literacy initiatives.
- Aboriginal local communities are in a better position to identify the needs of their residents and plan how a program should be delivered. Many Aboriginal people feel that literacy initiatives should be developed and controlled by Aboriginal peoples.
- The approach to Aboriginal literacy should be holistic. It should recognize and nurture the spirit, heart, mind and body of Aboriginal learners.
- Aboriginal literacy is an intergenerational matter best served by a community-based, family-focused approach.
- In order for Aboriginal literacy programs to be relevant and useful to learners, the values and culture of Aboriginal peoples, their experiences and history, should be reflected in the material that is used in adult basic education and literacy programs.
- Learning an Aboriginal language is just as important to Aboriginal learners as learning to read and write in English or French. Canada has 50 Aboriginal languages, but in 1996 only three of them (Cree, Ojibwa and Inuktitut) had enough mother tongue speakers to be considered safe from extinction over the long term.
- Some Aboriginal people feel strongly that English should be taught as a second language after one's mother tongue.

- Long-term adequate funding is critical to the success of Aboriginal literacy initiatives, as building literacy skills takes time.
- The time-consuming reporting requirements attached to funding agreements make it difficult for service providers to do what they do best: deliver literacy programming.
- Current literacy guidelines and measures of success do not capture the real accomplishments and triumphs of Aboriginal learners.
- Federal training programs focus solely on job preparation and not on building literacy skills that are essential to an individual's success in a training program or employment.

We don't have stats with which to work, because the first international adult literacy survey did not have enough representation of Aboriginal peoples to be able to extrapolate any meaningful data. For the second literacy survey, the results are just now being looked at, and that information will be ready shortly. So I have been using the stats from the aboriginal post-censal survey, which did not look at literacy specifically but rather at grade completion levels. In the Aboriginal community our completion levels are approximately half what they are in the non-aboriginal community. A number of things contribute to that — for example, teachers in the institutional educational system not understanding the learning styles or the political and socio-economic realities that affect aboriginal people. **(Priscilla George, Coordinator, National Aboriginal Design Committee)**⁶⁶

We are resourceful and culturally rich, but at the same time the NWT is home to some of the lowest literacy rates in the country. Of our Aboriginal residents, 50% do not have the literacy skills they need to meet the complex demands of today's world. In Canada, this is unacceptable. **(Cate Sills, Executive Director, Northwest Territories Literacy Council)**⁶⁷

As an educator, I have constantly reinforced and taught, pushed and cried, begged and borrowed, and stole moments of time with parents to teach them the value of teaching a child in their own first language. ... I've always believed, from my own teaching days, that when you teach a child in their first language, you don't have to teach their values, you don't have to teach them their traditions, you don't have to teach them their history, because they're involuntarily included in the language. ... I saw, through test and little studies that we did at the university, that children, when being taught English as a second language, fared better in terms of pride and volubility and all of the other things required for them to stand up and read out loud. **(Murdana Marshall, Retired Associate Professor, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey)**⁶⁸

⁶⁶ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:45), Meeting No. 10, 4 February 2003.

⁶⁷ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:30), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

⁶⁸ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (10:55), Meeting No. 20, 27 March 2003.

You spoke of the atrocities, where one generation through the residential school system lost that ability to communicate in their own language. Now, they're afraid to be involved in the schooling of their children, because they don't know how. From our perspective, at the Chief Dan George Centre, we want to incorporate parent participation with the youngsters so that it works both ways, so that we become comfortable teaching our children literacy. These can be simple things — how to read prescriptions, the health and safety issues with that, the issues around nutrition, being able to read what's on the back of a label. These are things that we take for granted. **(Darrel Mounsey, Executive Director, Chief Dan George Centre for Advanced Education, Simon Fraser University)**⁶⁹

They know that if they can learn to read, their child can learn to read, which means the generations down the road will learn to read. As soon as the light comes on, we hear, "Can I bring my daughter? Can I bring my son? ... So for me to sit there at the door and say, I'm sorry, you can't come in, I didn't have enough money to hire another person ... I saw this huge need, but I had to write it on paper and send it to somebody in an ivory tower who has no way of understanding who I'm working with ... **(Karen McClain, Instructor, Peterborough Native Learning Centre)**⁷⁰

To address these issues, many witnesses recommended that the federal government:

- support the development and implementation of an Aboriginal Literacy Strategy or Action Plan that would be managed and operated by Aboriginal peoples;
- support the creation of a national Aboriginal organization for literacy that will provide networking, research and support for Aboriginal educators;
- provide funding for Aboriginal communities to assess their needs and define their own solutions;
- provide funding for literacy initiatives in Aboriginal languages;
- integrate specific literacy programs and practices within the existing policies and programs for Aboriginal peoples;
- make current federal training programs (i.e., the Aboriginal Human Resources Development Strategy and programs under Employment Insurance Part II) less centred on immediate employment results. Funding guidelines should be more flexible and recognize the need to teach literacy skills, as they are precursors to specific training and employment;

⁶⁹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (11:35), Meeting No. 20, 27 March 2003.

⁷⁰ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (11:45), Meeting No. 20, 27 March 2003.

- provide long-term sustainable funding and resources for Aboriginal literacy initiatives and the infrastructure needed to deliver programs (e.g., provide for a new funding stream of the National Literacy Secretariat to be dedicated to Aboriginal literacy projects).

As far as I understand, the LMDAs are currently being renegotiated, or will soon be. I think they are a really good example of how we can integrate literacy into government programs and services. LMDAs are one example, and Aboriginal human resources development agreements are another. Moreover, EI part two dollars could certainly be used to support literacy. While these agreements are being negotiated between the federal government, the provinces, and territories, there are a number of different ways in which literacy can be supported through a range of currently existing government programs and services. **(Cate Sills, Executive Director, Northwest Territories Literacy Council)**⁷¹

First of all, ... I think programs need to be locally developed with regard to the different strategies. Yes, it could be one strategy, but every nation's needs and every community's needs are unique. I think it's very important to take that into account. As well, it's very difficult to separate pieces of literacy at different levels. You talk about Aboriginal literacy in the workplace. In order to get our people literate, we need to start with them even before they get to school. So it's all interconnected, and I think it's important to realize that. The more people who become literate, the more literate people you will have in the workplace ultimately. So, yes, we can focus on adult learners, and we can focus on preschool, and we can focus on youth and our elders, but you can't just pick little pieces and work that way. I think it's important to take a holistic approach to any strategy that's part of a recommendation. **(Irene La Pierre, Principal, Piitoayis Family School, Calgary Board of Education)**⁷²

First, use the input from practitioners and programs before creating initiatives and guidelines. As people who are working on the front lines, who are working with these learners coming in the door, we know how long it takes and we know basically what their needs are before they can begin to learn. We need our voices heard. **(Karen McClain, Instructor, Peterborough Native Learning Centre)**⁷³

First, someone has to find a way to ensure there is long-term secure funding for aboriginal literacy, and literacy initiatives have to go where aboriginal people are, not the other way around. **(Edwina Wetzel, Director of Education, St. Anne's School, Conne River First Nation)**⁷⁴

⁷¹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:55), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

⁷² HRDSPD, *Evidence* (12:55), Meeting No. 20, 27 March 2003.

⁷³ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (11:00), Meeting No. 20, 27 March 2003.

⁷⁴ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (11:15), Meeting No. 20, 27 March 2003.

The above issues and recommendations are echoed in the documentation produced by Métis organizations and research pertaining to literacy for Métis and non-Status Indian peoples. However, these organizations also see a need for a national literacy needs assessment of the Métis and non-Status Indians and for the establishment of a national literacy coalition for these groups.

The Committee was told that some steps have been taken to deal with many of the issues related to Aboriginal literacy. Following a national Aboriginal literacy gathering in Canada a few years ago, 129 representatives from every province and territory mandated the Aboriginal Design Committee to form a national Aboriginal literacy organization, which now is in the process of incorporation.⁷⁵ A number of not-for-profit organizations have set up literacy councils that serve Aboriginal peoples (e.g., Ontario Native Literacy Coalition, Nunavut Literacy Council and the Northwest Territories Literacy Council). The National Literacy Secretariat also funds a number of projects related to Aboriginal literacy. The Committee recognizes that building literacy skills takes time, and that an immense amount of work will have to be done to raise the current low levels of literacy skills of many Aboriginal peoples across Canada. We believe the federal government has a critical role to play in ensuring that First Nations people residing on reserves have access to quality education and that Aboriginal peoples across Canada have access to culturally relevant resources to raise the language and literacy skills of both current and future generations.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the federal government immediately begin consultations with the Aboriginal communities, and provincial and territorial governments, to develop an Aboriginal Literacy Strategy that: incorporates a holistic approach; respects Aboriginal languages, traditions and values; and is funded at a level commensurate with the seriousness of the problem of low literacy among Aboriginal peoples.

Recommendation 8

The Committee anticipates that the implementation of an Aboriginal Literacy Strategy will take some time. In the interim, the Committee recommends that a new National Literacy Secretariat funding stream be created — the Aboriginal Funding Stream. In addition to the amount currently being spent (approximately \$2 million) through the National Literacy Secretariat on Aboriginal literacy projects, the government should allocate \$5 million to this new funding stream, of which one-half should be delivered through the national Aboriginal literacy

⁷⁵ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:45), Meeting No. 10, 4 February 2003.

organization that is currently being established by the National Aboriginal Design Committee, while the remainder should be delivered via the existing funding streams, as is currently being done.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the federal government allocate \$15 million to supplementary Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements to fund Aboriginal workplace literacy initiatives.⁷⁶ In addition, some of the new funding (i.e., \$25 million over the next two years) to be delivered under the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership should be earmarked for literacy and numeracy skills development in major projects across the country. Furthermore, all federal programs aimed at increasing labour market participation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada should include basic education upgrading and literacy programs.

V. BUILDING CAPACITY, STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND DEVELOPING NEW APPROACHES

1. Expanding the Mandate and Capacity of the National Literacy Secretariat

The origin of the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) is rooted in the 1986 Speech from the Throne, which committed the federal government to “work with the provinces, the private sector and voluntary organizations to develop measures to ensure that Canadians have access to the literacy skills that are prerequisite for participation in an advanced economy.” The NLS was established by authorization of Cabinet in 1987. Since 1988, it has, according to witnesses’ testimony, done an excellent job developing and nurturing partnerships to promote literacy in Canada.

The federal government plays an important role by funding the National Literacy Secretariat and other initiatives. The NLS does an excellent job, but it is constrained by its limited resources and mandate. **(Wendy DesBrisay, Executive Director, Movement for Canadian Literacy)**⁷⁷

⁷⁶ The increase in funding that we propose under the AHRDAs is proportionately similar to the increase that we propose under the LMDAs.

⁷⁷ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:45), Meeting No. 12, 11 February 2003.

I would like to begin by thanking ... the National Literacy Secretariat for the excellent job they have done in providing coalitions like ours with the resources and guidance needed to accomplish our mandate. **(Jean Rasmussen, Director, Family Literacy, British Columbia Literacy)**⁷⁸

... the National Literacy Secretariat sounds like it's the best-kept secret in government. They have been very effective in building the kinds of partnerships and capacity at the regional and local level, and provincial and territorial level, to move literacy out. So I think you already have the bones of a delivery system. Their mandate needs to be expanded, it needs to be better resourced, and I think they have the ability to move this forward. **(Cate Sills, Executive Director, Northwest Territories Literacy Council)**⁷⁹

The funding our literacy coalition receives from the NLS has been critical to the development of a literacy infrastructure, to the promotion of literacy, and to the development of literacy programs and services in communities across the territory. Without this support, there would be no literacy infrastructure in Nunavut. **(Cayla Chenier, Literacy Development Coordinator, Nunavut Literacy Council)**⁸⁰

The NLS works through partnerships with the provinces, voluntary organizations, businesses, labour and other literacy stakeholders to promote interest in literacy and the value of literacy skills. This is accomplished by funding projects in five primary activities: (1) development of learning materials and tools; (2) research; (3) improved access and outreach; (4) coordination and information sharing; and (5) increasing public awareness. The NLS is not directly involved in delivering literacy programs to Canadians. This is done through the education system, voluntary groups, literacy organizations, labour and other groups that have an expertise in this area. In 2002-2003, about 16% of funded projects were designed to raise public awareness, an activity that all members of this Committee believe is very important and should be enhanced. About 27% of projects were related to developing learning materials, 33% pertained to coordination and information sharing, 11% were research-related, while 13% involved projects pertaining to access and outreach.

The role of the NLS is one of a facilitator, bringing together organizations that can benefit from each other's experiences. Project funding is delivered via two funding streams: the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Funding Stream and the National Funding Stream. Under the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Funding Stream, the NLS sponsors projects designed to address regional or local needs; as a result, projects vary according to provincial/territorial priorities and demands.⁸¹ Under the initial funding arrangement, provincial and the territorial governments were encouraged to match NLS funding. Today, contributions by these governments often exceed NLS funding. For instance, we were

⁷⁸ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:20), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

⁷⁹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:30), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

⁸⁰ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:55), Meeting No. 19, 25 March 2003.

⁸¹ Each province and territory has a literacy coordinator.

told that Manitoba's and Ontario's contributions are now about 3 and 10 times larger, respectively, than the federal government's share. Funding earmarked for Quebec is governed by a Ministerial Agreement that identifies, among other things, the groups to be funded and funding levels. Roughly one-half of the NLS's grants and contributions budget is allocated to the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Funding Stream.

Under the National Funding Stream, the NLS supports literacy projects in partnership with national literacy organizations, provincial/territorial literacy coalitions, business, labour and non-governmental organizations with an interest in literacy. The NLS has fostered the sharing of expertise in best practices to prevent duplication and to increase effectiveness. As well, in its work with business and labour it has encouraged non-traditional learning opportunities and innovative ways of promoting learning, both inside and outside the workplace.

Funding provided through the NLS and the partnerships that are developed help to pool resources by leveraging financial commitments from a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental sources. The Committee was frequently told that the partnerships that have been developed with the support of the NLS are one of the keys to a successful literacy policy in this country. There is no doubt that these partnerships permit resources to be concentrated and ideas exchanged. They also inform the literacy community of what is being done, and in a world of limited resources this is crucial for not only minimizing duplication, but also replicating what works best.

In addition to noting that the NLS is under-funded, some witnesses criticized the NLS's mandate on the grounds that it prevents the Secretariat from providing ongoing funding for successful literacy projects. We were told that funding cannot exceed three years, and this constraint limits the ability of the NLS to broaden substantially the application of successful projects.

... an initial NLS project of \$80,000 for a social marketing campaign about literacy needs had a seven-to-one return on investment on your dollars. That seed grant helped us to solicit \$40,000 from the province to join that campaign; collect \$58,000 from the corporate sector at the next two PGI golf tournaments, which we put towards learner bursaries and new materials; secure a grant of \$100,000 from the Manitoba Lotteries to produce a TV series, which reached thousands by satellite this winter; and finally, link to the Winnipeg Foundation through the campaign's radio and billboard publicity. **(Marg Rose, Executive Director, Literacy Partners of Manitoba)**⁸²

Since its inception, the NLS has worked with more than 1,400 organizations including literacy organizations, school boards and community colleges, as well as national organizations for health, criminal justice, transportation and women's issues. Since 1988, it has funded more than 5,000 projects.

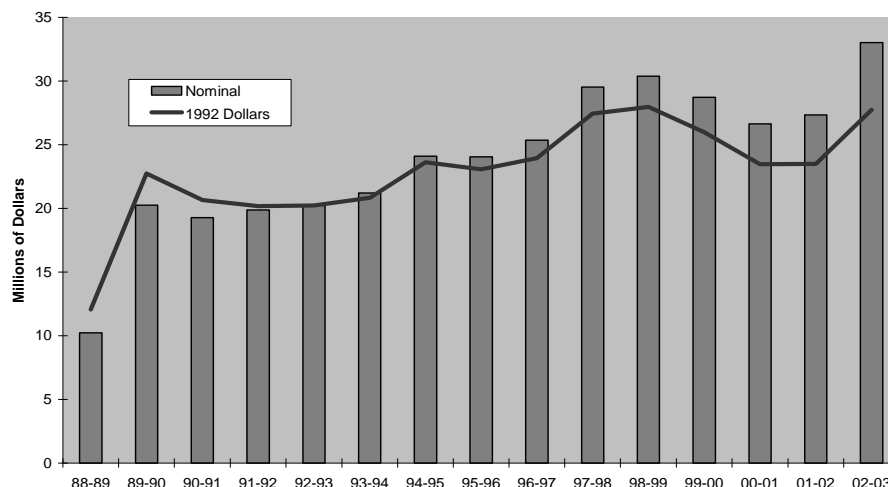
⁸² HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:35), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

Chart 4 provides a graphic illustration of NLS expenditures on grants and contributions since 1988-1989. As shown in the chart, the level of literacy spending, both in current and constant dollars, has increased slightly during this period. The level of spending in 2002-2003 was an anomaly in that it includes a one-time endowment of \$5 million made in memory of Peter Gzowski. In 2003-2004, planned spending on the National Literacy Program is estimated to be \$28.2 million.⁸³

Unfortunately, it can be said that francophones have a much lower literacy rate than anglophones. In the world we live in, we cannot afford to have a sub-population of francophones with this problem. So in terms of intervention, it may be appropriate to set priorities. **(Luce Lapierre, Executive Director, Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français)**⁸⁴

Based on witnesses' testimony, most members of the Committee regard the spending levels exhibited in Chart 4 to be woefully inadequate, given the magnitude of this country's low literacy problem. However, some of us are concerned about allocating large sums of money to the NLS without really understanding the extent to which the demand for literacy training exceeds our capacity to provide it. In addition, members believe that it is critical for the NLS to gain a better understanding of the impact of its expenditures on literacy levels. We fully appreciate that the NLS is but one of several players in the production of higher literacy skills in Canada; nevertheless, a way must be found to better measure success and program effectiveness, a shortcoming that was identified in a recent evaluation of the program.

CHART 4 - National Literacy Secretariat Grants and Contributions



Source: Human Resources Development Canada, National Literacy Secretariat; and Parliamentary Research Branch, Library of Parliament.

⁸³ Human Resources Development Canada, *2003-2004 Main Estimates, Part III — Report on Plans and Priorities*, 2003, p. 80.

⁸⁴ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:45), Meeting No. 12, 11 February 2003.

We do not measure results from every individual. Because we fund third-party organizations to undertake this work, we don't count the number of participants, the number of Canadians who are involved in our programs. That ... was identified as one of the areas for improvement in our recent evaluation that was done at the NLS. We really have to find ways to capture this data. We now are beginning to have instruments where we can assess a person's literacy skills when they go into a program. We should be assessing them when they come out of the program to see how much time, how much improvement occurred. **(Lenore Burton, Director General, Learning and Literacy Directorate, Human Resources Development Canada)**⁸⁵

The Committee realizes, that despite some misgivings about capacity and program performance, we must begin to address what appears to be a significant under-investment in literacy skills. We must identify funding within the existing federal budget that can be used to increase markedly our investments in literacy projects funded through the NLS. In our view, this program should be one of the key recipients of the government's commitment in its *October 2002 Economic and Fiscal Update* to reallocate funding from lower to higher priorities. In the February 2003 budget, the government indicated its intention to reallocate \$1 billion per year from existing spending programs, beginning in 2003-2004.⁸⁶

With the support of the National Literacy Secretariat and community partners, including us, but many, many other groups, since 1988 we have set up an effective foundation across this country, but we're simply reaching too few people. We're reaching between 5% and 10% of the people we've been talking about and you've been hearing about in this committee. So an increase in funding. ... I understand there are limits to that. That's why we're encouraging this committee to continue investigating it and to work out a funding level ... that would enable us to make a significant impact and deal with significant numbers of people for the future. **(John O'Leary, President, Frontier College)**⁸⁷

... more money should indeed be invested and ... I also think that more money should be allocated to the National Literacy Secretariat. **(Christian Pelletier, Coordinator, Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec)**⁸⁸

The National Literacy Secretariat, HRDC, I must be on the record to say they deserve praise and commendation. It's been an important vehicle of financial and technical support to our Canadian Labour Congress, its affiliated unions and provincial and territorial federations of labour involved in literacy initiatives since 1988 and has provided critical support to building the capacity of unions to move

⁸⁵ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:15), Meeting No. 26, 1 May 2003.

⁸⁶ Department of Finance, *The Budget Plan 2003*, 18 February 2003, p. 25.

⁸⁷ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (17:20), Meeting No. 12, 11 February 2003.

⁸⁸ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (17:55), Meeting No. 19, 25 March 2003.

forward on literacy in the workplace and on the public policy front. However, it no longer has the resources to meet the current demand. **(Kenneth Georgetti, President, Canadian Labour Congress)**⁸⁹

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that:

- **The National Literacy Secretariat's annual grants and contributions budget be increased from \$28.2 million to \$50 million. This increase does not include new funding for the proposed Aboriginal Funding Stream. New funding should continue to be delivered through the National Funding Stream and the Federal/ Provincial/Territorial Funding Stream, including the agreement with Quebec, and should respect any other conditions that may be specified following an agreement on a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development. [Note: The reference to a pan-Canadian accord is intended to mean that the federal government should try to reach unanimous agreement with the provinces and territories to address this nation's serious low literacy skills problem. If unanimous agreement is not possible, the Committee encourages the federal government to work with individual provinces and territories to achieve the same results. In either case, since this issue falls within the constitutional domain of the provinces and territories, an agreement is required to formalize federal support.];**
- **One-third of the increase in funding be allocated to eligible projects for a multi-year period in order to assess the impact of stable funding on the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills;**
- **The National Literacy Secretariat use its extensive partnership network to examine the extent to which the demand for literacy training exceeds supply;**
- **The National Literacy Secretariat be sensitive to the literacy needs of francophone adults in view of the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey which found a higher incidence of low literacy among francophone adults compared to anglophone adults;**

⁸⁹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:30), Meeting No. 23, 18 April 2003.

- **The National Literacy Secretariat develop, in conjunction with literacy providers, clear, measurable goals, objectives and performance indicators for assessing individual's literacy and numeracy skills, to be reported on by recipients of NLS funding. Once these performance indicators are developed, Human Resources Development Canada should report on these each year in its Performance Report.**

2. Helping Communities and Families

Literacy policy must recognize the important role played by the family in developing and instilling the value of literacy skills in children, given that learning begins in the home. Research evidence suggests that the early years, from conception to age six, are the most important of any time in the life cycle of brain development and subsequent learning. According to one study, reading to and playing with children in the first 36 months after birth promotes the development of children's verbal ability.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, parents with low literacy skills are unable to contribute a great deal to the literacy development of their children. Hence, the Committee believes that a coherent literacy policy must include family literacy as a critical component.

Family literacy programs treat the family as a learning unit. One of the goals of these programs is to promote reading and learning as a valued family activity. Family literacy programs also aim to break the intergenerational cycle of low literacy skills. While there is some evidence as to the effectiveness of such programs in achieving this crucial socio-economic outcome, the Committee believes that the National Literacy Secretariat should support demonstration projects that attempt to assess this aspect of family literacy initiatives. The Committee was told that research conducted by the National Center for Family Research in Kentucky found that 85% of children who attended a comprehensive family literacy program were at or above grade level 10 years after participation and that 66% of participating parents were gainfully employed or participating in higher education.⁹¹

I would like to share a couple of examples of the true results of literacy programs. Laubach's volunteer president taught a young man named Daniel to read and write in northern Saskatchewan. Daniel is the first member of his family in five generations who is not on welfare, so a family cycle has been broken and a new family value has been established. **(Robin Jones, Executive Director, Laubach Literacy of Canada)**⁹²

... in 1994 my partner, Laureen MacKenzie, and I had a little idea that we brought to the federal-provincial partnership. Through a small grant we were able to

⁹⁰ Margaret McCain and Fraser Mustard, *Reversing the Real Brain Drain: Early Years Study*, Final Report, April 1999, p. 36.

⁹¹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:05), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

⁹² HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:25), Meeting No. 12, 11 February 2003.

research and refine our idea, and thus, Literacy and Parenting Skills, LAPS, a family literacy program, was born. It develops literacy skills while participants learn about parenting. Our program is now recognized nationally and has been adapted for use with first nations, francophones, and English as a second language low-literate parents. **(Elaine Cairns, Vice-President, Alberta Literacy)**⁹³

We have a family portion of our program, which makes us unique, where we involve the parents as partners in education with the focus once again being on family literacy, healthy families, families and culture, and developing healthy lifestyles. We ... will develop programs, events, and cultural camps aimed at working with the families to strengthen their relationship to the school and the families' own education. The family portion of the program was made possible through early childhood development funding dollars. So we were very fortunate in receiving some of that. **(Irene La Pierre, Principal, Piitoayis Family School, Calgary Board of Education)**⁹⁴

Using this program ["Tools For Community Building"], Holman, a small Inuit community on the Arctic coast, was able to develop its own comprehensive community family literacy plan based on partnerships among the local school, the day care, the language and culture program, and elders and parents. The result has been a range of programming that supports both English literacy and Inuinnaktun language and cultural activities, thereby meeting the twin goals of supporting literacy through language and cultural revitalization. **(Cate Sills, Executive Director, Northwest Territories Literacy Council)**⁹⁵

The federal budget made some mention of it in talking about improving aboriginal education outcomes and some mention of community and parental involvement. We know that's key. If parents are taking more interest in their children and students' work in the school, then it's definitely going to encourage success among our young people and students. So we think that family literacy is an area that we would like to see more focus on, making parents and grandparents — who are quite often the caregivers — more comfortable with the English language and able to work with their young students in those areas. So community and parental involvement is key. **(Danette Starr-Spaeth, Executive Director of the Education and Training Secretariat, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations)**⁹⁶

Learning-oriented communities undeniably support family literacy. The concept of a learning community extends well beyond the formal school system and captures the learning capacity that is widely available in the public and private sectors (e.g., voluntary sector, libraries, museums, health and social service agencies, workplaces, schools, etc.).

⁹³ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:25), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

⁹⁴ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (10:50), Meeting No. 20, 27 March 2003.

⁹⁵ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:30), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

⁹⁶ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:45), Meeting No. 21, 1 April 2003.

By building partnerships among all learning providers and by integrating learning resources, learning communities can better meet the human capital needs of individuals functioning in a society that is growing in knowledge intensity.⁹⁷

I think it would be good if childcare was provided ... I also think more money should be given to literacy organizations to help them with all the work they do. That way they could hire more staff and have more learners.⁹⁸

Learning supports and easy access (tutors, scribes, adapted evaluations, technological special equipment, etc.) are essential for adults with learning disabilities.⁹⁹

The Committee learned about a community-wide literacy initiative in Birmingham, one of England's most culturally diverse cities. This initiative emerged as a result of a prolonged decline in Birmingham's traditional manufacturing base — the automotive industry. In 1995, initial steps were taken to transform Birmingham into a European tourist attraction. In doing so, it was decided that a significant investment in basic human capital was needed. Not only were the city's secondary school completion rates below national average; a high proportion of adults had low literacy skills, and it was discovered that not enough children were entering school with the basic "kit" of skills. A decision was made to reallocate some of the funding earmarked for physical infrastructure to raise literacy and numeracy skills across all areas, ages and sectors of the city.¹⁰⁰ We were told that work

⁹⁷ As discussed elsewhere in our report, we think supplementary training support could play a key role in encouraging individuals to participate in, and successfully complete, literacy training. According to research conducted by Ms. Ellen Long of Alpha Plus, socio-economic factors, including access to childcare, are considered to be central barriers to participation in literacy training. Overcoming these barriers will undoubtedly require a better approach for integrating learning resources in our communities.

⁹⁸ Learners Advisory Network for the Movement for Canadian Literacy, Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, April 2003.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ In taking the decision to form the Core Skills Development Partnership, a formal, independent legal entity to enhance the city's human skills infrastructure, a long-term vision was adopted. This vision involved several key strategic outcomes, including raising the baseline skills of children on entry to school; raising the educational attainment levels of 7-year-olds, 11-year-olds, 14-year-olds and 16-year-olds; raising the achievement levels for adult basic literacy; and increase the number of volunteers supporting basic skills development. To achieve this vision, a yearly business plan was created containing a proposed set of objectives for each year. Business plan objectives were captured in Activity Agreements that outlined the work to be done, and progress was to be monitored quarterly. Birmingham's plans for regenerating human skills received a big boost in the spring of 2001 when the British government unveiled its national strategy (*Skills for Life*) to tackle the problem of adult low literacy and numeracy. In fact, some of Birmingham's early human skill regeneration activities were incorporated in the national literacy strategy. With additional funding, Birmingham established a target to reduce the number of adults with poor basic skills by 25% by 2005 and by 50% by 2010. In 2000, it was estimated that there were about 140,000 adults with basic skill needs. The challenge to reduce this to 70,000 adults by 2010 was considered achievable if the city could double the number of adult literacy learners, double the success rate and substantially reduce the number of youths leaving school with low literacy levels. To do this, the Partnership decided that a new approach to workplace literacy was needed. Under the leadership of the local Learning and Skills Council, an awareness campaign was implemented to brief large numbers of employers on the need to become involved. Literacy needs in the workplace were identified, self-accessment CD-ROMs were developed and learning centres were established in workplaces. The plan to take Birmingham towards 2010 is continuing to evolve and will undoubtedly be influenced by ongoing evaluations of development activities that have occurred thus far. In addition, the evaluation process will document "lessons learned" that can be applied in ongoing and new regeneration activities. (See *Moving the Mountain: A Whole-City Approach to Basic Skills Development*, A compilation of presentations by Geoff Bateson, Partnership Manager of the Birmingham Core Skills Development Partnership. This information was provided by Literacy British Columbia).

has now begun in Vancouver to implement a decade of learning, modeled in part on Birmingham's Core Skills Development Partnership, in support of the city's bid for the 2010 Olympics.

We are now prepared to take our work to the next level and initiate learning community projects that could serve twin objectives, namely, fostering federal government objectives around the learning and skills agenda ... and the role of family literacy in building social and human capital. The second objective would be to support Vancouver's Olympics bid, through a proposed decade of literacy and learning, informed by successful models such as the Birmingham core skills partnership in the U.K. (**Jean Rasmussen, Director, Family Literacy, Literacy British Columbia**)¹⁰¹

As noted earlier in our report, we believe that community partnerships, such as those supported by the National Literacy Secretariat, are essential to raising low literacy levels in this country. They permit resources to be consolidated and ideas to be exchanged, and they inform the literacy community of what is being done so as to minimize duplication and replicate what works best. One community partnership that needs to be utilized more pertains to Canada's public library system. Unfortunately, a number of successful library-based literacy programs have ceased due to a lack of funding. Some initiatives that are still operating include Vancouver's parent-child Mother Goose initiative, which is designed to reach parents with young children who infrequently use the library. In Regina, the Albert Library is involved in two literacy projects. One of these, the Community Stories Program, brings firefighters and library assistants into the classroom to read to children in grades 1 to 3. The other, Herchmer Community School Family Literacy Project, develops and promotes family literacy. The Regina Public Library also delivers an on-line project called "Readthis.ca", which provides plain language news stories with questions and answers to help individuals digest information. The Iqaluit Public Library offers a number of literacy-related initiatives, including an opportunity for inmates from the Young Offenders Facility and Baffin Correction Centre who demonstrate good behaviour to visit the library once a week and borrow up to three books.¹⁰²

We also believe that community learning is strengthened through increased initiatives such as those supported by Industry Canada's Community Access Program (CAP) and HRDC's Office of Learning Technologies (OLT). Originally initiated in rural communities in 1994 and extended to urban communities in 1999, CAP and OLT now give many Canadians public access to the Internet, supported by specialized computer technology to assist persons with disabilities. OLT promotes innovative lifelong learning opportunities for Canadians in a variety of ways, including the promotion and support of Community Learning Networks through the use of technology.

¹⁰¹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:20), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

¹⁰² Canadian Library Association, *Literacy Programs in Public Libraries*, Brief submitted to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, 10 April 2003.

The Committee was told that technology's impact on individuals with low literacy skills is double-edged: technology can be a barrier, as mentioned earlier in our report in the context of the digital divide; or it can provide an interest or an incentive to learn, as well as offer learning opportunities in remote regions of the country (i.e., distance learning).

That's what the AlphaRoute study is showing. We wondered, can you really take a person functioning at a low skill level and expect them to function independently, and so on? But there are cyber-tutors, and there are other levels of support. We can't keep expecting people to step forward into programs. There are so many bricks-and-mortar limits to what you can deliver, so I think we have to look more into this. **(Marg Rose, Executive Director, Literacy Partners of Manitoba)**¹⁰³

About three or four years ago we realized that many in our community were seriously in danger of being totally left behind in the Internet world. You're probably aware of the work that's been done by the Office of Learning Technology at HRDC, which started off looking at the digital divide and is now looking at the dual digital divide. The experience has been that in partnership with Industry Canada, when they put CAP sites across the country, a certain number of people, even people who've had difficulty getting into the Internet previously, have moved on and learned about the Internet and what it can do. But there are a persistent number, the bottom end of the dual digital divide, who have not. We were fortunate to be one of the first community-based agencies to get a CAP site, and we put it in beside our literacy program. Over time it's become a component of what is becoming a lifelong learning centre at St. Christopher House. **(Susan Pigott, Chief Executive Officer, St. Christopher House)**¹⁰⁴

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the National Literacy Secretariat:

- **Expand support for community learning and family literacy partnerships;**
- **Develop distance learning educational material and facilitate projects that make access to literacy training more equitable for those who reside in remote parts of the country or prefer not to pursue literacy training in institutional settings;**
- **Promote and support more literacy initiatives that involve the participation of public libraries, a key contributor to literacy promotion and development in our communities.**

¹⁰³ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:35), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

¹⁰⁴ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:50), Meeting No. 11, 6 February 2003.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the federal government continue to promote and support the development and evolution of learning networks that enable communities to build learning capacity through the use of network technologies.

3. Early School Leavers

We all recognize that one of the long-term solutions to Canada's low literacy problem is a primary and secondary school system that ensures that all graduates leave school with the literacy skills required to participate fully in Canadian society. One way the federal government can help provincial and territorial governments meet this objective is to help fund student literacy assessments. Currently, the federal government supports literacy assessment of French- and English-speaking students across the country through the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA is a collaborative effort among OECD countries to uniformly assess the literacy skills of 15-year-old students in three literacy domains: reading literacy, mathematical literacy and scientific literacy. PISA cycles have been planned for each domain. In 2000, the major focus was reading literacy; mathematical literacy and scientific literacy will be the primary focus in 2003 and 2006 respectively. According to the results of PISA 2000, Canada ranked second in reading, fifth in science and sixth in mathematics out of 31 countries.¹⁰⁵

The next slide ... looks at the literacy skills of 15-year-olds in provinces and countries that participated in the OECD PISA study. We see that Canada is second only to Finland in average reading skill ... If Alberta were a country, it would be the best country in the world ... All of the provinces are above the OECD mean. So relative to our trading partners, we're doing very well with 15-year-olds, but there is a great deal of variability from province to province. **(Scott Murray, Director General, Institutions and Social Statistics, Statistics Canada)**¹⁰⁶

Another important area where the federal government can help youth raise their literacy skills is by encouraging early school leavers to return to school. We know that the number of years of education is one of the strongest predictors of literacy scores. Youth who dropped out of secondary school scored substantially lower on the IALS's literacy test than those who completed high school.¹⁰⁷ Low literacy among early school leavers also translates into a serious unemployment problem. In 2002, for example, the average unemployment rates of youth 15 to 24 years of age with a grade 8 or some high school

¹⁰⁵ HRDC, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, and Statistics Canada, *Measuring Up: The Performance of Canada's Youth in Reading, Mathematics and Science*, December 2001, p. 13.

¹⁰⁶ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:00), Meeting No. 17, 18 March 2003.

¹⁰⁷ J. Willms, *Literacy Skills of Canadian Youth*, Statistics Canada, Cat. No. 89-552-MIE, No. 1, p. 23.

education were 25.8% and 20.3% respectively.¹⁰⁸ This is close to double the rate for youth who graduated from high school, and almost triple that for the labour force as a whole.

According to HRDC's 2003-2004 Main Estimates, the Youth Employment Strategy (YES) was realigned, in keeping with the announcement in the 30 September 2002 Speech from the Throne, to ensure that the government's youth employment policy keeps pace with young people's changing employment needs. Clearly, one of these needs, at least among early school leavers, is literacy skills training. However, as far as we can ascertain, the realignment of YES largely overlooked youth with low literacy skills. Ideally, the Committee would like to see a program that provides some incentive for early school leavers to return to school and complete at least a high school education. In this context, we recall the relatively successful Stay-in-School initiative that operated between 1989 and 1995. An evaluation of this program found that it generated an increase in student retention and school completion (e.g., more than 60% of students who participated in 1992-1993 completed their year because of the program), and was extremely cost effective.¹⁰⁹

The Committee argues that literacy investments in young adults offer taxpayers one the best returns on investments in literacy, since this age group is associated with the longest payback period. Moreover, there is the potential for realizing intergenerational benefits once these individuals begin to raise families. For these reasons, the Committee is extremely puzzled as to why the Literacy Corps¹¹⁰ budget in 2002-2003 was reduced by 50%. We are certainly opposed to this decision.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that:

- **As part of a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy, the federal government, in agreement with the provinces and territories, consider redirecting some of the funds allocated to the Youth Employment Strategy to support further education among young early school leavers through a “learn and earn” initiative that results in at least high school completion [Note: The reference to a pan-Canadian accord is intended to mean that the federal government should try to reach unanimous**

¹⁰⁸ Statistics Canada, *Labour Force Historical Review, 2002* (Cat. No. 71F00004XCB).

¹⁰⁹ H. Hackett and D. Baran, *Canadian Action on Early School Leaving: A Description of the National Stay-in-School Initiative*, 1995 (see <http://icdl.uncg.edu/ft/051799-01.html>).

¹¹⁰ Literacy Corps funds projects directed at out of school youth 15 to 24 years of age. Eligible activities include: developing learning materials; researching youth literacy; improving access and outreach; enhancing information sharing and coordination for youth literacy services; and raising public awareness related to youth literacy issues.

agreement with the provinces and territories to address this nation's serious low literacy skills problem. If unanimous agreement is not possible, the Committee encourages the federal government to work with individual provinces and territories to achieve the same results. In either case, since this issue falls within the constitutional domain of the provinces and territories, an agreement is required to formalize federal support.];

- The National Literacy Secretariat restore its Literacy Corps budget to \$1 million starting in 2004-2005;
- The Government of Canada continue to provide sufficient financial support for the pan-Canadian assessment of students' literacy skills.

4. Literacy and Persons with Disabilities

Studies have shown that levels of education, literacy skills and employment are lower among persons with disabilities than the rest of the Canadian population. According to the 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), 77% of people with learning disabilities¹¹¹ and 48% of those with physical disabilities had document literacy scores below Level 3, compared to 36% of those with no disability.¹¹² As well, results from the 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) show that approximately 13% of adults aged 15 years and over with some kind of disability reported learning disabilities, representing 1.9% of Canadians aged 15 years and over.¹¹³ Among children, the number is much higher. Learning disabilities were reported in an estimated 100,000 school-age children, accounting for almost two-thirds of all school-age children who report disabilities. Boys were more likely to have a learning disability than girls (68.9% and 58%, respectively).¹¹⁴ Other PALS data on education and employment among adults with disabilities are expected to be available in mid-summer 2003. The latest published data from the 1996 Census revealed that persons with disabilities were less likely to have completed high school than non-disabled Canadians (50% vs. 70%) or to have obtained a university degree (7% vs. 17%). These findings are particularly troubling as it has been

¹¹¹ According to the Learning Disabilities Association of Canada's definition, adopted on 30 January 2002, learning disabilities refer to a number of disorders that may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding, or use of verbal or nonverbal information.

¹¹² HRDC, *Technical Report-Advancing the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities*, Chapter 4, Skills Development, Learning and Employment, 2002 (<http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/hrib/sdd-dds/odi/documents/AIPDTR/ft000.shtml>).

¹¹³ It should be noted that in the context of this survey, a learning disability was defined as a "difficulty learning because of a condition, such as attention problems, hyperactivity or dyslexia, whether or not the condition was diagnosed by a teacher, doctor or other health professional." The data exclude the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

¹¹⁴ Statistics Canada, *Participation and Activity Limitation Survey: A profile of disability in Canada*, *The Daily*, Tuesday 3 December 2002 (<http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/021203/d021203a.htm>).

demonstrated that some people with disabilities who have had the opportunity to develop higher literacy skills are more likely to be employed than other adults with disabilities. For adults with disabilities who have a university education, the employment rate is more than double that of those with only an elementary school education. The likelihood of participating in the paid labour force, however, varies depending on the nature of an individual's disability.^{115, 116}

One issue that is consistently reported by Centres taking part in the "Navigating the Waters" employment project is that lack of required skills, lack of education and **low literacy skills** create an additional barrier for many Canadians with disabilities who choose to pursue employment or employment related activities.¹¹⁷

Learning disabilities are now recognized as a lifelong neurological disorder that affects at least 10% of Canadians; of those, more than 80% experience difficulty learning to read. However, it is important to remember that different types of disabilities affect the development of literacy skills differently. Learning disabilities may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following:

- Oral language (e.g., listening, speaking and understanding);
- Reading (e.g., decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension);
- Written language (e.g., spelling and written expression); and
- Mathematics (e.g., computation, problem solving).¹¹⁸

It is estimated that 30% to 80% of adult learners in literacy and basic education programs have learning disabilities, of which up to 50% are undiagnosed. This may be because, in the past, less was known about learning disabilities and very young children were not assessed for them. Studies have shown that if learning disabilities are not recognized at an early age and appropriate intervention is not provided before the age of 8, there is a high probability (75%) that the learner will continue to have reading difficulties in high school. At that point, 35% of students who are identified with learning disabilities

¹¹⁵ According to the 2001 PALS, approximately one out of every seven Canadians aged 15 and over, or an estimated 3.4 million Canadians, reported some level of disability. Of those reporting disabilities, 1.1 million reported mild levels of disability, 855,000 reported moderate levels, and 1.4 million reported severe or very severe levels.

¹¹⁶ HRDC, *Living with a Disability in Canada: An Economic Portrait*, 1996 (http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/hrib/sdd-dds/odi/documents/living_with_disability/chap26_e.shtml#1).

¹¹⁷ Susan Forster, Brief to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres, 10 April 2003, pp. 2-3.

¹¹⁸ Saskatchewan Literacy Network, *Literacy Matters. Reading the word ... Reading the world*, Vol. 3, No. 4, April 2002, p. 12 (<http://www.nald.ca/PROVINCE/SASK/SLN/News/02april/april02.pdf>).

will drop out of high school. As adults, many of these individuals will join a literacy or basic skills program but the majority will drop out, as literacy and Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs are not able to meet their special needs.¹¹⁹

Learning disabilities are neurological and lifelong. They affect one or more processes related to learning. And when I talk about learning, I'm talking about learning in very many different — contexts in school, in the workplace, on the soccer field, in the family context, and in social situations. There is a strong overlap between literacy and learning disabilities. If we look at some of the statistics, 30% to 50% of all students in literacy and basic education have undiagnosed learning disabilities. Of all participants in job training programs, 15% to 30% have undiagnosed learning disabilities, and 25% to 40% of all adults on welfare also have learning disabilities. **(Elizabeth Gayda, Past President, Learning Disabilities Association of Canada)**¹²⁰

As discussed elsewhere in our report, learning disabilities are also present in individuals with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) and Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAE). Current research into FAS/FAE indicates that these conditions may negatively affect an individual's capacity to learn and may be a factor to consider when assessing the needs of adult learners with low literacy skills. FAS/FAE affects individuals throughout their lifetime. A school-age child with FAS/FAE may display primary disabilities such as hyperactivity, attention deficit, learning disabilities, arithmetic difficulties, cognitive deficits, language problems and poor impulse control. In adolescence and adulthood, the primary difficulties are memory impairment, problems with judgment and abstract reasoning, and poor adaptive functioning. There is considerable evidence linking FAS/FAE with attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity, conduct disorder, and delinquency and crime. It is estimated that in Canada at least one child is born with FAS each day. Initial studies also suggest that the rates of FAS/FAE in some Aboriginal communities may be significantly higher. The extra costs of health care, education and social services associated with the lifetime care of an individual with FAS are estimated at US \$1.4 million. In January 2000, an \$11 million federal FAS/FAE initiative was introduced to enhance activities in a number of areas including FAS/FAE public awareness and education, surveillance, early identification, diagnosis and intervention, training and capacity development, and support to community-based programs.¹²¹ The Committee is aware that FAS/FAE is a major source of concern for those involved in the delivery of health care, education, correctional and social services. We fully support the federal government's efforts to prevent FAS/FAE, as well as other initiatives undertaken by federal and provincial/territorial governments and not-for-profit organizations aimed at improving the health of Canadian children and families affected by FAS/FAE.

¹¹⁹ Movement for Canadian Literacy, *Literacy and Learning Disabilities*, Fact sheet No. 7 (<http://www.literacy.ca/litand/7.htm>).

¹²⁰ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:35), Meeting No. 10, 4 February 2003.

¹²¹ Health Canada Web site at http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/english/feature/magazine/2000_08/fas.htm.

A small number of literacy programs across the country are trying to address some of the issues mentioned above by ensuring that literacy skills development is accessible to adult learners with disabilities. A recent survey undertaken by the Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres (CAILC) showed that a majority of the literacy program providers surveyed (265 respondents) indicated that their facilities are physically accessible to people with disabilities. However, only a small number of programs could address the needs of learners who are visually impaired, blind, hearing impaired, or who have other more complex disabilities. Furthermore, public library services for Canadians who are print disabled are uncoordinated and provided only on a discretionary, non-standardized and therefore inconsistent basis.¹²² The Committee, in agreement with the submissions it received, believes that all Canadians should have the right and the choice to access literacy programs and library services in their communities. Alternative formats, such as Braille and the use of plain language documents, should be readily available to minimize barriers and maximize reading and understanding. It is essential that the literacy needs of Canadians with disabilities be fully included in literacy policy throughout the country.

Research data tells us that the literacy needs of people with disabilities have not been met. Despite the extraordinary efforts of some literacy practitioners and disability groups across the country, the literacy picture for people with disabilities has remained relatively unchanged over the past decade. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands of literacy programs in Canada. A literature review has revealed that there are too few which serve the needs of people with disabilities. The legacy of a segregated education system and few literacy program options for people with disabilities in Canada is lower educational attainment, poor literacy skills and high unemployment.¹²³

At the federal level, several policies and programs aim to remove barriers to participation and inclusion of people with disabilities in employment and learning opportunities. For example, the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities supports individuals in preparing for, finding and keeping employment or in becoming self-employed. However, the Committee was told that this fund is relatively small (i.e., \$23.8 million in 2003-2004), and that its focus is on assisting people to obtain employment as soon as possible and not on enhancing the literacy skills they need to maintain substantially gainful employment. We were also told that the application process for funding was administratively complex and should be streamlined.

¹²² Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Draft CNIB Position Statement on Nationwide Accessible Library Service, 17 March 2003.

¹²³ Amy Tooke Lacey, *Intervention and Integration: Canadian Disability, Literacy, and Capacity-Building*. A Brief to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Literacy Network Supporting People with Disabilities, 5 April 2003.

In general, the opportunities funding program has been helpful to people with disabilities; however, there are a number of issues regarding opportunities funding that I would like to point out to you: the funding is relatively small and hasn't been increased for as many as four years, while costs of things such as workplace accommodations, training allowances and specialized services have all increased in cost. **(Bernadette Beaupré, Co-Chair, National Coalition of Community Based Training)**¹²⁴

HRDC will undertake to renew the terms and conditions of the Opportunities Fund in the current fiscal year. The Committee anticipates that these terms and conditions will recognize the importance of literacy skills development and will facilitate access to literacy assessment services and development for persons with disabilities. As well, a joint federal/provincial initiative, Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities (EAPD) helps persons with disabilities prepare for, attain and retain employment. Agreements under the EAPD expired as of March 2003, and HRDC is working with its federal and provincial/territorial partners to develop and implement successor agreements.¹²⁵ The Committee fully expects these agreements to be part of a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and to include services and supports for persons with disabilities, as we believe that increasing levels of literacy among persons with disabilities will contribute to increasing their rate of labour force participation and their quality of life.

The Committee is pleased that the Minister of Labour plans to invest \$5 million in 2003-2004 to develop workplace strategies for persons with disabilities and for Aboriginal peoples, as recommended in our report *Promoting Equality in the Federal Jurisdiction: A Review of the Employment Equity Act*. This is a good start; but this Act is limited in its coverage, and much more needs to be done. We fully expect the literacy needs of persons with disabilities to be reflected in the comprehensive agreement that is being negotiated with the provinces and territories to remove barriers to participation in work and learning for persons with disabilities.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that some of the National Literacy Secretariat's new resources for stable funding be allocated to literacy projects for persons with learning disabilities, in recognition of the fact that many individuals with learning disabilities need long-term literacy assistance for which multi-year funding would be appropriate.

¹²⁴ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:55), Meeting No. 24, 10 April 2003.

¹²⁵ HRDC, 2003-2004 Estimates, Part III — Report on Plans and Priorities, 2003, pp. 29-30.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the comprehensive agreement that is currently being negotiated with the provinces and territories to remove barriers to participation in work and learning for persons with disabilities include literacy and numeracy skills development as key components.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the federal government expand the budget (i.e., \$23.8 million in 2003-2004) of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities by \$5 million and dedicate additional funding to literacy and numeracy skills development.

5. Newcomers to Canada

For highly skilled immigrants whose educational and professional credentials are recognized in our labour market, the transition to life in Canada is relatively smooth. However, as noted earlier in our report, the IALS data suggest that this transition is probably problematic for many immigrants, as Canada's foreign-born population had a relatively large share of individuals with low literacy skills. In 1994, some 59% of foreign-born individuals in Canada 16 years of age and over had low prose literacy skills, compared to 45% of similarly aged domestic-born individuals. In terms of low document literacy skills, the foreign- and domestic-born shares of the surveyed population were 57% and 45% respectively. Similarly, 52% of the foreign-born population 16 years of age and over had low quantitative literacy skills, compared to 47% of domestic-born individuals.¹²⁶

In order for newcomers to prosper and contribute fully to Canadian society, it is essential that they speak English and/or French fluently, and have basic literacy skills. The Committee was told that between 1999 and 2001, the number of newcomers who declared that they had the ability to speak English or French was roughly similar to those who had no ability to speak either language. In 2001, for example, 114,775 (46%) declared an ability to speak English, 11,315 (4.5%) could speak French and 13,027 (5%) were bilingual, compared to 111,229 (44%) who had no ability to speak either official language.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ It should be noted that immigrants are also over-represented at the highest literacy levels. In fact, among the countries participating in the IALS, Canada had the greatest proportion of foreign-born individuals in the highest literacy levels (i.e., Levels 4/5).

¹²⁷ R. Frith, Director General, Integration Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, Opening Statement before the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, 29 April 2003.

The federal government spends approximately 80% of its \$333-million settlement budget on language-related programs for adult immigrants each year. Basic language instruction is delivered through a program called Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) in all parts of the country save Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia.¹²⁸ A number of witnesses addressed the language and literacy needs of immigrants.

We make it a priority to provide the language training to the most recent arrivals over people who have been here for several years ... If they have been here as an immigrant for over three years, they've applied for citizenship and become a citizen and they are still having difficulty with language, they cannot access the settlement language training programs. So our priorities are: recent immigrants, basic levels first and, as much as possible in partnerships, higher levels of language for those skilled people who need it. Also to combine the higher levels of language training where we can with bridging programs that are associated with the workplace so there's a single window to go from learning the language at the same time that you're getting some experience and employers are more apt to hire you. **(Rosaline Frith, Director General, Integration Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada)**¹²⁹

Our testimony indicates that current efforts to provide second-language instruction to recent immigrants lack coordination, focus on short-term interventions and are not oriented to immigrants' labour market language needs. In 1990, Citizenship and Immigration Canada revised its language programs for immigrants, replacing employment-oriented programs with general language instruction under LINC. The lack of focus on the Canadian labour market may in part be due to the fact that labour market-oriented programs are the responsibility of HRDC.¹³⁰ We acknowledge the announcement in the February 2003 Budget that \$10 million will be invested over two years to deliver labour market training on a pilot basis at more advanced levels than currently provided. However, we suspect that this measure may be directed primarily at highly skilled immigrants in need of specific occupational training.

Given the short-term nature of immigration language instruction today, we feel that the second-language needs of immigrants with literacy challenges are being overlooked. Considering that studies have demonstrated that it can take up to seven years to develop fluency in a second language, it is estimated that many immigrants with low literacy skills leave second-language programs well before achieving fluency in an official language, making it much more difficult for them to access other training or Adult Basic Education programs.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Under agreements with the federal government, the governments of Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia provide immigrant settlement and integration services that are comparable to those offered elsewhere in Canada, with federal compensation.

¹²⁹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (17:10), Meeting No. 25, 29 April 2003.

¹³⁰ N. Alboim and The Maytree Foundation, *Fulfilling the Promise: Integrating Immigrant Skills into the Canadian Economy*, Caledon Institute, April 2002, p. 34.

¹³¹ D. Millar, *Second Language Students in Canadian Literacy Programs: Current Issues and Current Concerns*, prepared for the Red River Community College, January 1997, p. 9 (available on-line at <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/slsinclr/page09.htm>).

There is a need for immigrants and refugees to have access to high-quality literacy programming. Currently in Ontario, we are struggling with gaps in literacy service to these groups. For example, although immigrants and refugees have been identified as having needs for literacy upgrading, services to help them are often not available. Literacy and ESL are often treated quite distinctly, because of provincial and federal jurisdictions. Literacy programs may refer newcomers with literacy needs to LINC and ESL classes, but these classes may not meet the literacy needs of these individuals. Funding for first language bridging programs for newcomers who have literacy challenges in their first language have also been cut. **(Sue Folinsbee, Acting Co-Executive Director, Ontario Literacy Coalition)**¹³²

Turning to the specific issue of just labour market language training, we're recommending also a reorientation and expansion of the ... Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada ... Currently, the program provides instruction to level 3, which does not fully equip an individual with the language or literacy skills needed for the labour market, nor does it equip, for example, a parent to advocate effectively and articulately with the school system on behalf of their child. These are essential-based elements of inclusion — economic and social. We are, therefore, recommending higher benchmarks within LINC, labour market orientation within the program and the development of occupation-specific benchmarks in training. **(Elizabeth McIsaac, Manager, The Maytree Foundation)**¹³³

I think the time allotted to individuals for language training is likely not enough. There's a big difference between a professional immigrant who needs to learn one of the official languages and a person who is both not literate and new to either language. We need approaches that teach both things together. The other even more challenging thing is that in some provinces there are policies about literacy delivery that don't allow them to teach immigrants because the province wants to keep it in the federal domain. In other provinces, it's not an issue. **(Wendy DesBrisay, Executive Director, Movement for Canadian Literacy)**¹³⁴

The shortcomings associated with LINC, especially in terms of immigrants in need of second-language literacy training, are of concern to members of the Committee, given that immigration is expected to account for all net labour force growth in this country by 2011. We must be better prepared to ensure that immigrants have access to second-language training programs that last long enough and provide adequate levels of instruction to accommodate their full economic integration in Canada. Moreover, although the issue is not directly related to the problem of low literacy, members of the Committee also believe strongly that we must begin to make significant gains in assessing and recognizing the academic and labour market credentials of immigrants.

¹³² HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:00), Meeting No. 19, 25 March 2003.

¹³³ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:55), Meeting No. 25, 29 April 2003.

¹³⁴ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (17:15), Meeting No. 12, 11 February 2003.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that:

- **Citizenship and Immigration Canada review its budget for Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada to ensure that sufficient funding is available to help individuals, including those with second-language literacy needs, overcome difficulties entering the labour market because they lack official language skills. Any additional funding must also be reflected in funding under the settlement agreements with Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia;**
- **The level and duration of language instruction provided under Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada be assessed to ensure that it is meeting the needs of immigrants and refugees;**
- **Funding be made available to provide supplementary services, such as transportation and child care, to assist newcomers who are unable to access language instruction because they lack the necessary supports.**

6. Literacy, Justice and Corrections

A. Literacy and the Criminal Justice System

The Committee was told that people with low literacy skills who come in contact with the criminal justice system are more likely to be victims of miscarriages of justice as a result of their inability to navigate and communicate in a system that takes for granted high levels of literacy skills. Low literacy can affect every step of the criminal justice process from understanding one's rights upon an arrest, to testifying before a court, to the sentencing phase of a trial. Traditionally, laws, regulations, court materials, resources and supporting documentation are written in a language that assumes high literacy skills on the part of the reader.

The fact is that courts are environments which operate at a very high level of literacy, the language, the concepts, even common words with special meanings in this particular environment, for a person to function well and understand what was taking place it requires a high level of literacy. While at the same time the majority of people who appear in court, not just the accused but also witnesses and victims, are frequently operating at a very low level of literacy. In that kind of circumstance

it puts an enormous burden on the courts to ensure that the proceedings are in fact fair and that the person has a fair trial. **(Graham Stewart, Executive Director, John Howard Society of Canada)**¹³⁵

Committee members were informed that the Department of Justice has taken initial steps to ensure that laws and regulations are written in plain language and that public legal information and education programs are available across the country.¹³⁶ We are aware that revising laws and regulations is an extremely long and complicated process and we strongly support all measures taken by the Department of Justice to move in this direction. As previously noted in Chapter 2, section II, the Committee recommends that all programs and services (including those delivered by the Department of Justice) be assessed to ensure that the government's literacy policy and goals are being met and that they are accessible to individuals with low literacy skills. In the case of the criminal justice system, this is an issue of fundamental justice.

B. Literacy Skills of Offenders in Canada

Evidence before the Committee, as well as numerous studies, shows that a majority of offenders admitted into correctional institutions in Canada have significant literacy and educational deficits. As many as 75% of inmates have low literacy skills. Correctional Service Canada (CSC) uses standard "literacy" testing (e.g., the School and College Ability Test (SCAT) or the Canadian Adult Achievement Test (CAAT)) to assess the literacy and education needs of offenders admitted to correctional facilities.¹³⁷ These tests are designed specifically to measure the level of educational achievement, and not literacy skills as per the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS).¹³⁸ Based on these standardized school equivalency tests, 70% of offenders entering federal custody in fiscal year 1993-1994 scored below a grade 8 education level and 86% below a grade 10 level.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:40), Meeting No. 25, 29 April 2003.

¹³⁶ For example, the *Consumer Fireworks Regulations* were selected as the subject of a pilot project to redraft a portion of the regulations and to test and evaluate the process. This pilot project was a success and illustrates that regulations can be rewritten in plain language. See the *Consumer Fireworks Regulations Final Report* (<http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/rs/rep/wd95-4a-e.html>).

¹³⁷ It should be noted that the CAAT is not used in the province of Quebec. Offenders incarcerated in correctional facilities in Quebec are evaluated according to standard tests of the Ministère de l'éducation du Québec, which ensure an appropriate placement in an adult basic education program.

¹³⁸ Literacy is not synonymous with educational attainment, although the IALS uncovered a definite relationship between education and literacy levels. It is nonetheless impossible to compare the literacy skills of the inmate population in federal custody to those of the rest of the Canadian population, as the CAAT is very different from the assessment conducted in the 1994 IALS. However, an American study based on the 1994 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), which included interviews with approximately 1,100 inmates of federal and state prisons, found that 7 out of 10 inmates performed at the two lowest levels of literacy skills. Therefore, on the average, inmates had substantially lower literacy skills than the general population. These results are consistent with CSC data on educational attainment. See K. O. Haigler et al., *Literacy Behind Prison Walls*, National Center for Education Statistics, Washington, D.C., 1994.

¹³⁹ Roger Boe, *A Two-Year Release Follow-Up of Federal Offenders Who Participated in the Adult Basic Education (ABE) Program*, Correctional Service Canada, Research Branch, February 1998, p. 3.

More recent studies based on the reported education level of inmates of correctional institutions show that they continue to have significant educational deficits compared to the Canadian average. According to a Snapshot Survey completed by the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics covering all inmates on-register in federal and provincial/territorial adult correctional facilities in Canada¹⁴⁰ on 5 October 5 1996, 34% of those inmates had completed a grade 9 education or less, compared to 19% of adults in Canada.¹⁴¹ An even larger proportion of those in federal institutions (46%) had a grade 9 education or less.¹⁴² Another 29% of offenders in federal facilities had a grade 10 or 11 education, and 25% had a grade 12 education or higher. High-risk offenders generally had less education than low- and medium-risk offenders.¹⁴³ Almost one-half (49%) of high-risk offenders in federal facilities had a grade 9 education or less, compared to 36% of low-risk offenders and 42% of medium-risk offenders.¹⁴⁴ In provincial/territorial facilities, 53% of high-risk offenders had a grade 9 education or less, compared to 39% of low-risk offenders and 40% of medium-risk offenders.¹⁴⁵

Recent data on the educational status of federal offenders provided by CSC show that a large proportion of offenders incarcerated in federal institutions as of January 2003 had less than a high school diploma. These data are presented in Charts 5 and 6.

¹⁴⁰ The “on-register” population refers to the number of inmates who have been placed in a facility to serve their sentence.

¹⁴¹ This Snapshot is unique. It was the first time that inmates in federal, provincial and territorial adult correctional facilities in Canada had been surveyed on the same day, and there are no comparable data. It must be noted that education data were not available for British Columbia and Yukon, and for 64% of inmates incarcerated in CSC facilities. Recent data available on offenders incarcerated in federal adult correctional facilities in Canada suggest that the socio-demographic profile of offenders, particularly as it pertains to educational attainment, has been relatively stable over time. We are unaware of any study that would suggest that such a profile would be substantially different today in federal or provincial/territorial adult correctional facilities.

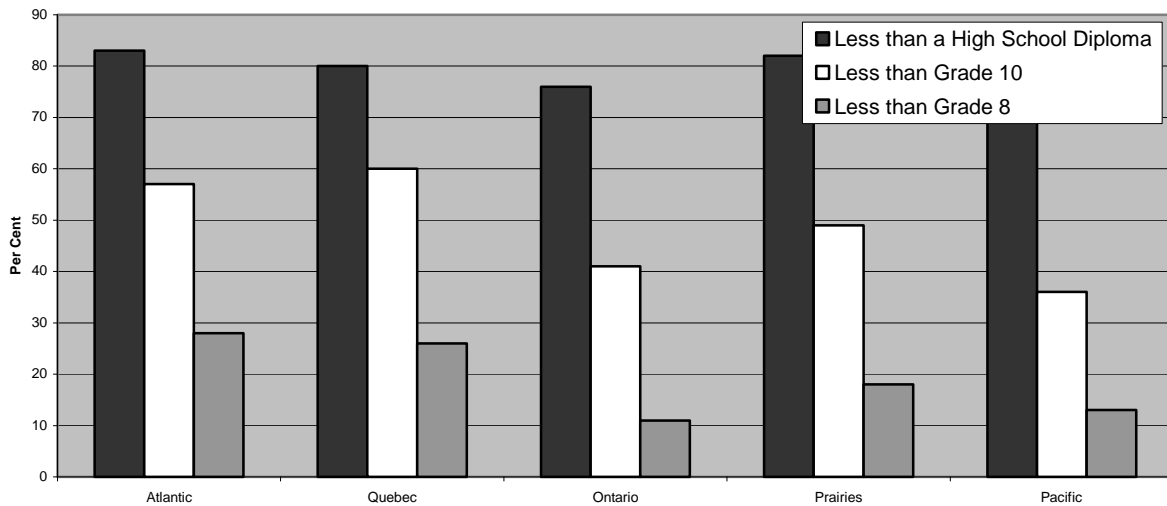
¹⁴² Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, *A One-Day Snapshot of Inmates in Canada's Adult Correctional Facilities*, Statistics Canada, Cat. No. 85-601-XIE, March 1999, p. 24.

¹⁴³ In this study, provincial/territorial inmates were classified according to five levels of risk, ranging from “very low” to “very high”. Overall, only a small proportion of inmates (3%) were classified as very low risk, while a larger proportion was classified as low or very high risk (14% each). The medium-risk (34%) and high-risk (35%) groups represented the largest proportions of the population classified. For comparative purposes, the two lowest risk categories and the two highest risk categories were combined in order to provide a simpler three-level risk classification. It should be noted that risk refers to the risk of re-offending, not necessarily the seriousness of the offence.

¹⁴⁴ Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (1999), p. 334-335.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28

CHART 5 - Distribution of Offenders in Federal Prisons, by Level of Education and Region, 1 January 2003



Source: Statistics Canada and the Parliamentary Research Branch, Library of Parliament

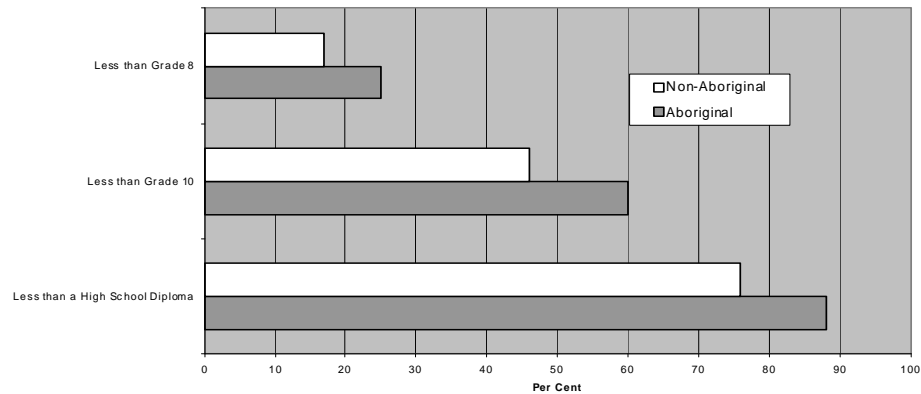
The Committee was also told that inmates are likely to have learning disabilities, some of which are attributed to Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAS/FAE). Undoubtedly, this is a contributing factor to the low literacy skills of a high proportion of offenders. However, the number of offenders with low literacy skills who have learning disabilities or FAS/FAE is not yet known, as CSC is not currently screening offenders for these factors. CSC is considering a screening process for learning disabilities at the intake assessment process in the very near future.¹⁴⁶

... we're looking at implementing a screening process for learning disabilities at the intake process. When a new offender comes into the system, they go through an intake assessment process and there's various things that are looked at including education and literacy levels. But we also have identified through the intake process that we need to refine our assessment tools to look for learning disabilities. We see more and more examples of individuals who are coming into the system who present as fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effect and we need to take that into account before we have offenders participate in other education programs or some of our traditional correctional programs such as substance abuse, family violence abuse programming. **(Don Head, Senior Deputy Commissioner, Correctional Service Canada)**¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:25), Meeting No. 25, 29 April 2003.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Chart 6 - Distribution of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Offenders in Federal Institutions, by Level of Education, 1 January 2003



Source: Statistics Canada and the Parliamentary Research Branch, Library of Parliament

Members of the Committee support this initiative and suggest that CSC continue to improve its assessment tools to ensure that the literacy and education needs of every offender entering a correctional institution are appropriately assessed and that any learning disabilities or other challenges (e.g., FAS/FAE) to their participation in education programs are taken into account and immediately addressed. The Committee, in agreement with witnesses from CSC and the John Howard Society of Canada, also suggests that staff in federal correctional institutions be trained to recognize and assist offenders with low literacy skills.

C. Adult Basic Education Programs in Correctional Service Canada's Institutions

Adult Basic Education (ABE) is one of a number of education and vocational training opportunities that aim to assist offenders' reintegration into the community and reduce the risk that they may re-offend. The Committee was pleased to hear that CSC has educational programs in all its correctional facilities and that approximately 30 to 35% of the offender population participated in these programs. Instruction is provided in a traditional classroom setting, in small groups, or through individual tutoring.¹⁴⁸ In a limited number of institutions, special ABE programs also address the needs of Aboriginal

¹⁴⁸ Frontier College provides one-to-one tutors for inmate learners who are functioning at below a Grade 10 level. Currently, the College offers tutoring services in five federal institutions in the Kingston area: Kingston Penitentiary, Regional Treatment Centre, Frontenac Institution, Collins Bay Institution and Isabel McNeill House. In the last year, 37 inmates benefited from this initiative. Frontier College has a waiting list of approximately 20 inmates. Tutors are mostly recruited from Queen's University. In 2002-2003, the prison literacy initiative counted on the volunteer work of 40 tutors, all of whom were Queen's University students except for one community member.

offenders. At any given time, approximately 270 teachers are engaged in delivering education and literacy services to federal inmates across the country. The majority of those are under contract with CSC.¹⁴⁹

Members of the Committee are well aware that offenders who improve their literacy skills while in prison benefit in many ways. Inmates who voluntarily participate in prison-based education programs gain self-confidence, develop a desire to continue learning and are less likely to re-offend.¹⁵⁰ Data from a 1998 CSC study showed that “ABE participation provides significant benefits for offenders and contributes to their safe reintegration to the community.”¹⁵¹ The study compared a sample of male federal offenders who participated in ABE with a national sample of paroled offenders over a period of two years following their release from a correctional institution. Findings showed that 718 paroled offenders who completed ABE-grade 8 level had a 7.1% reduction in readmissions. The reduction in readmission rates increased with each higher-grade level of education completed. For example, 74 paroled offenders who completed ABE-grade 10 level had a 21.3% reduction in readmissions.¹⁵² However, the study cautions that “graduating from an ABE program provides basic literacy, but an ABE-8 or -10 level is not very competitive in the real job market. In the final analysis, education for basic literacy will continue to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the successful reintegration of offenders.”¹⁵³

The Committee believes that CSC should continue to facilitate offenders’ participation in education programming; it should look at ways to increase the number of offenders involved in such programming and expand the number of education and literacy programs offered in correctional institutions.

I guess the only parting message I would leave is that based on the work that we’ve done in federal corrections, the research that we know, the more time and energy and effort that we put into addressing the literacy and education issues of offenders, I think ultimately the safer we make our communities when these individuals return back home. **(Don Head, Senior Deputy Commissioner, Correctional Service Canada)**¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:25), Meeting No. 25, 29 April 2003.

¹⁵⁰ More recent U.S. studies also conclude that correctional programming, particularly education programs, shows promise of reducing recidivism and increasing post-release employment. See *Education Reduces Crime, Three-State Recidivism Study — Executive Summary*, published through a partnership between the Correctional Education Association (CEA) and the Management & Training Corporation Institute, February 2003, available online at <http://www.ceanational.org/documents/3StateFinal.pdf>.

¹⁵¹ Boe (1998), p. viii.

¹⁵² As previously noted, readmission rates are not to be confused with recidivism rates. Readmission rates are somewhat of a crude measure that does not distinguish between readmission for a technical violation of conditional release and readmission as a result of a new offence.

¹⁵³ Roger Boe (1998), p. 61.

¹⁵⁴ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (17:20), Meeting No. 25, 29 April 2003.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that, as part of a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development, the federal government work in partnership with provincial and territorial governments to ensure that enough resources are available to meet the literacy and numeracy skills development needs of inmates across the country. This should include funding to permit inmates to make the transition to community literacy programs once they are released. [Note: The reference to a pan-Canadian accord is intended to mean that the federal government should try to reach unanimous agreement with the provinces and territories to address this nation's serious low literacy skills problem. If unanimous agreement is not possible, the Committee encourages the federal government to work with individual provinces and territories to achieve the same results. In either case, since this issue falls within the constitutional domain of the provinces and territories, an agreement is required to formalize federal support.]

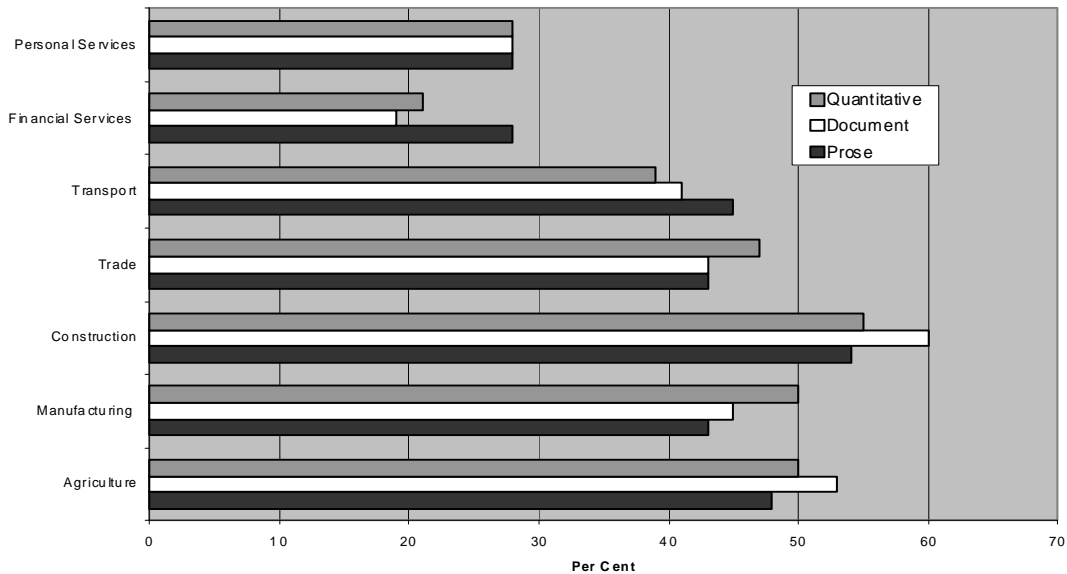
VI. LITERACY AND THE WORKPLACE

Over the years, changes in the composition of production and in production processes have had a profound impact on the type of work we do and the way it is done. As jobs change, so do the skills required to do them. As the relative importance of knowledge-intensive sectors continues to grow, the relative demand for more highly educated and skilled workers will rise. In 1971, 19.2% of all workers were employed in high-skilled occupations. In 1981 and 1986, high-skilled occupational employment accounted for 23.5% and 26% of total employment respectively.¹⁵⁵ As noted at the outset of our report, it is estimated that by 2004 more than 70% of all new jobs created in this country will require some form of post-secondary education.¹⁵⁶ This trend does not bode well for low-skilled/low literacy individuals in the labour market, as evidenced by the high proportion and rate of unemployment among the least educated segments of the labour force.

¹⁵⁵ Economic Council of Canada, *Employment in the Service Economy*, 1991, p. 94.

¹⁵⁶ Government of Canada, *Knowledge Matters: Skills and Learning for Canadians*, 2002, p. 8.

CHART 7 - Distribution of Low Literacy Skills by Industry



Source: Statistics Canada, *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada, 1996*, p. 45; and the Parliamentary Research Branch, Library of Parliament.

Chart 7 shows the distribution of low literacy skills by industry. Of all the industry categories listed, the financial and personal services industries had the smallest proportion of low literacy workers across all literacy domains (i.e., prose, document and quantitative) in 1994, the year in which the IALS was conducted. Although the construction and agriculture industries registered the highest proportions of low literacy workers in all three literacy domains, it should be noted that the manufacturing, trade and transport industries also exhibited very high proportions (39% to 50%, depending on the literacy domain) of low literacy workers.

... our own analysis in working with Statistics Canada shows basically that the average Canadian worker begins to lose prose literacy, which is the essential skill for the workplace in whatever occupation one might have, at the age of 20. One could argue, and certainly ministers of education would argue perhaps that the education systems are doing their job up until the end of formal schooling but perhaps the workplace is not responding in the way that it might ... We find that not surprisingly Canadians with a post-secondary education lose their prose literacy skills relatively slowly. Canadians with no post-secondary education lose their literacy skills very quickly indeed, far more quickly than in most countries in the OECD ... What that means is that Canadian workers, and therefore Canadian productivity appear to be at a significant disadvantage when compared with other developed countries in the OECD ... **(Dr. Paul Cappon, Director General, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada)**¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:30), Meeting No. 28, 6 May 2003.

As Canada's economy continues to shift toward knowledge-based growth, the skill content of jobs will continue to rise. And with the prospect of labour force aging and slower labour force growth in the years ahead, more and more emphasis will be placed on those currently in the labour market to supply these skills. Not only will the importance of continuous skill acquisition or lifelong learning continue to grow, so will the need to ensure that workers acquire and maintain the necessary literacy skills on which to build. If we fail to address Canada's low literacy problem, this will only exacerbate potential labour shortages in the years to come, an issue that is weighing heavily on the minds of labour market observers across the country.¹⁵⁸

According to a study undertaken by the Conference Board of Canada, employers provide literacy and essential skills training for many reasons, including productivity improvements both in terms of quantity and quality of output, lower costs, improved labour-management relations, better teamwork and the ability to meet organizational objectives. Workers also benefit from investments in literacy. It is estimated that over an employee's lifetime, a male worker with a high document literacy level can expect to earn \$1,743,000 in pre-tax earnings, or \$585,000 more than a male worker with a low document literacy level. A female worker with high document literacy can expect to earn \$1,242,000 in her lifetime, or \$559,000 above that estimated for women with a low document literacy level.¹⁵⁹

It is obvious to us that higher literacy skills enhance employers' profitability, which in turn raises the earnings of workers. In fact, a more highly skilled and literate workforce is one of the keys to improving productivity and the economic well-being of Canadians. The Committee is thus somewhat mystified as to why the incidence of workplace-based training is so low in this country when, given the abundance of workers with low literacy skills across the country, the opportunity for economic gains is so great. Representatives from several companies that received the Conference Board's *Awards for Excellence in Workplace Literacy* clearly identified some of the economic and social benefits arising from investments in workplace literacy, although we should mention that the majority of these firms received public support in one form or another to undertake them.

The province paid for the teacher; Avon provided space, curriculum, materials, and refreshments; the union provided the necessary textbooks; and the employees attended the class on their own time. It was truly a cooperative effort. Immediately we saw a team evolve ... Within the factory peers were convincing each other to make the voluntary decision to participate in the learning process. Management was an active participant, expecting positive results ... Avon has benefited from this in many ways and is becoming a leader in many aspects of the food industry. We have experienced a reduction in customer complaints. Our reputation for

¹⁵⁸ The Committee is aware of the Conference Board of Canada's estimate that there could be a shortfall of up to one million workers by 2020. We are sceptical of this estimate, since it is based on assumptions that prevent the labour market from adjusting to excess demand for labour and the unemployment rate from falling below 4%. In addition, the study did not consider that some labour is underutilized (see Conference Board of Canada, *Performance and Potential, 2000-2001*, 2000, p. 57).

¹⁵⁹ M. Bloom, M. Burrows, B. Lafleur and R. Squires, *The Economic Benefit of Improving Literacy Skills in the Workplace*, Conference Board of Canada, August 1997, p. 10.

quality has grown, and our processing line has improved to become an extremely predictable operation. Our customer service has improved to an exceptionally high level, and the management and union enjoy a unique respect for each other. Now Avon has an adaptable, resourceful, and problem-solving workforce. All of the above ... provide the Avon organization with a competitive advantage. **(Albert Craswell, Plant Manager, Avon Foods Inc.)**¹⁶⁰

The cycle of low literacy in ... [Durabelt Inc.] has been broken. The manager is saying they have a social responsibility to the community, so now when younger people come from the high school — there's a regional high school within walking distance of this company — looking for jobs at Durabelt, she simply says, "Don't come looking for a job. Please tell your friends not to come here. Go back to school." The employees who wrote their grade 12 GEDs and passed them now are saying, "I'm going to make sure my children finish school before they go to work. I don't want them to have to do what I did." Just being turned on to education again is extremely important. They've all taken ownership for their business success. They have just secured their largest contract ever, and they very much worked as a team to accomplish that. As I said, it's been a win situation for absolutely everybody. **(Ruth Rogerson, Field Officer, Durabelt Inc.)**¹⁶¹

The benefits for National Silicates have just been amazing. We now have these transferrable skills, and the employees can work in any of the businesses as a chemical process operator ... For the plant, we have reduced our overtime. We have reduced the cost of maintenance in our plants because all employees can work anywhere in the plant ... the skills throughout the plant have been expanded ... We are part of an American company, and we're often under the gun to be closed. The productivity in this plant has assured us, every time I get our financial statements, of another spot. It is the diamond in the crown of the PQ Corporation, because we are known as the can-do plant. **(Lynda Ryder, Director, Employee Relations, National Silicates)**¹⁶²

Typically, classes take place the last hour of the shift, and they stay one extra hour after that. These are held twice a week throughout the year. This has been very successful, and we train approximately 400 employees a year through this kind of programming. But one of the things we wanted to address was the people who aren't attending classes. Typically, the burden falls on women, because they are unable to stay after work because of child care responsibilities. So we started mini tutorials right on the plant floor. The instructor goes to the employees, either one on one, one on two, or one on three, depending on their language level, and gives them vocabulary that is specific to their job. **(Valerie Unwin, Language Training Coordinator, Palliser Furniture)**¹⁶³

The Committee was told on several occasions that employers fail to provide workplace literacy training because they face too many barriers. In addition to being unaware of the problem and the economic benefits associated with fixing it, we were told that employers tend to believe that the provision of adult basic education is the

¹⁶⁰ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:25), Meeting No. 22, 3 April 2003.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* (15:40).

¹⁶² *Ibid.* (15:50-15:55).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* (15:55).

responsibility of the public education system. More importantly, many employers, especially small ones, maintain that they lack the necessary financial resources to finance workplace literacy.

I do deal with our closures and our layoff situations. That's part of my job and I can tell you that very often as I go through almost mechanically the questions about what the workforce looks like, so that we have some sense of adjustment needs, more often than not I will ask the workplace committee if there are any literacy issues and very often I'll be told no, there are no issues, only to find out two weeks later or a few weeks later we receive phone calls of panicked committee members saying they've got all these people who can't fill out their EI report cards because they can't comprehend a lot of this. **(Laurell Ritchie, National Representative, Training & Work Organization Department, Canadian Auto Workers Union)**¹⁶⁴

Generally, companies acknowledge very little responsibility as regards the literacy of their employees. Rather, they tend to view this as a societal and individual responsibility ... In addition, literacy training for employees does not produce satisfactory results from the company's point of view if it is not part of an effort to update the knowledge employees require in order to carry out their duties and responsibilities. **(Françoise Grenon, Teaching Consultant, Business Services, Commission scolaire de Montréal)**¹⁶⁵

We all know that ... small-sized and medium-sized enterprises are the major creator of jobs in Canada today. As such their success is going to be essential to the well-being of Canada's economy. If these businesses are to survive and to increase productivity, employers must ensure that their employees have the necessary basic workplace skills to learn new technology and the high performance work processes of our modern society. **(Gerald Brown, President, Association of Canadian Community Colleges)**¹⁶⁶

At the beginning literacy was a tool... to train our one department of housekeeping for national certification. I soon learned that literacy is the avenue and the infrastructure. ... What we need as a small business are programs, because we cannot afford human resources or training like large businesses and we often go without. I was lucky because of the things I mentioned — the partnerships we had — to be able to move ahead and show some success ... I see a lot of my peers in other areas struggling as well because we do not have human resource departments, training budgets, or training. **(Clarence Neault, General Manager, La Ronge Motor Hotel, Saskatchewan)**¹⁶⁷

When firms do invest in training, these investments, more often than not, are undertaken by large firms and are usually directed at highly educated workers. According to the results of a recent study on the determinants of training in Canadian firms, 26% and 24% of employees in 1999 received classroom and on-the-job training respectively in

¹⁶⁴ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:50), Meeting No. 23, 8 April 2003.

¹⁶⁵ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:30), Meeting No. 22, 3 April 2003.

¹⁶⁶ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:30), Meeting No. 24, 10 April 2003.

¹⁶⁷ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:50), Meeting No. 22, 3 April 2003.

companies with fewer than 20 employees. This compares unfavourably to the 48% and 32% of employees who received classroom and on-the-job training respectively in companies with 100 or more employees. Furthermore, the study found that 21% and 23% of employees without a high school diploma received classroom and on-the-job training respectively in 1999, compared to 49% and 33% respectively for employees with a university degree.¹⁶⁸ The study also found that workplaces covered by a collective agreement that provide for training have a higher incidence of employee training than firms covered by collective agreements that do not provide for training or firms that are not covered by collective agreements. The Committee was told that the collective agreements with Daimler-Chrysler, General Motors and Ford contain provisions for basic skills development. Modelled after the Ontario Federation of Labour's BEST (Basic Education for Skills Training) program, these collective agreements provide employees with an opportunity to improve their reading, writing and math skills for a period of 37 weeks at four hours per week. One-half of an employee's class-time is paid at the employee's regular wage rate, while the remainder is unpaid.

There are various models of employer support for literacy that unions have wanted at the bargaining table including paid time for training — so many cents per hour worked into a fund — for employees, a percentage of payroll, paid leave programs, tuition advances, etc. Often union-initiated programming can demonstrate models and help raise the standard that will, in turn, have a positive impact on non-unionized workplaces as well. **(Kenneth Georgetti, President, Canadian Labour Congress)**¹⁶⁹

The Committee recognizes the important role played by labour representatives in establishing and promoting workplace literacy, and we encourage them to continue working with employers and employees to develop new avenues and approaches for ensuring that workers who need literacy training receive it. One model for developing stronger union-management relationships in workplace literacy training is the sector council. In fact, we were told that the development of essential skills training has been the top priority for the Textiles Human Resources Council since 1996.¹⁷⁰ We are pleased that HRDC intends to extend the reach of sector councils by doubling their labour force coverage from 25% to 50% in the next five years; however, more sector councils do not necessarily translate into more workplace literacy.¹⁷¹

While developing stronger workplace literacy partnerships is undeniably important, it is obvious to us that employers will generally under-invest in literacy training in the absence of incentives. Given society's belief that these investments generate external benefits that are sufficiently large for taxpayers to pay for primary and secondary

¹⁶⁸ J. Turcotte, A. Léonard and C. Montmarquette, *New Evidence on the Determinants of Training in Canadian Business Locations*, Statistics Canada and HRDC, 2003, p. 22-23.

¹⁶⁹ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:25), Meeting No. 23, 8 April 2003.

¹⁷⁰ Textiles Human Resources Council, Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, April 2003.

¹⁷¹ HRDC, *2003-2004 Estimates, Part III — Report on Plans and Priorities*, 2003, p. 22.

schooling, a similar policy rationale would suggest that public support should be provided to encourage firms and workers to invest more heavily in basic human capital. While some witnesses embraced the idea of a tax credit as an appropriate incentive for this purpose, others noted that this approach is limited in instances where companies, especially small ones, have a limited tax liability. In addition, the costs of workplace literacy are usually borne when the training occurs, while the proceeds of a tax credit are realized after the costs of training are incurred. This lag could entail cash flow problems for some employers; as a result, they might opt not to provide training. Despite these drawbacks, most members of the Committee recognize that tax credits may be an effective incentive in certain cases. Two other key proposals that were raised during our hearings to encourage employers to provide more workplace literacy initiatives included making greater use of Employment Insurance (EI) Part II funds and providing an EI premium repayment for employers who provide literacy training.

The Committee was also told that there are many unemployed individuals who do not qualify for EI Part II benefits, and that given the predominance of low literacy skills among the unemployed, consideration should also be given to expanding access to those benefits. The Committee acknowledges that this suggestion is in keeping with one of the strategies agreed to by the National Summit delegates who participated in the working group on Building an Inclusive and Skilled Work Force, which selected as its priority recommendation “increase the participation levels of under-employed groups (including women, youth, people with disabilities, visible minorities and Aboriginal people).”¹⁷²

HRDC skills development program is currently only available to EI and reach-back clients ... We believe that HRDC’s skills development program must be open to all clients, regardless of income support. In general, we believe that HRDC must review its employment benefit support measures program, with a view to ensuring that programs are available to a wider range of clients and, in particular, to non-EI clients that require longer-term interventions. Again, these are clients who are not going to be job-ready in a short period of time and will not return to the workforce with these shorter-term interventions. So as it stands right now, the group of individuals who require the most support has the least or the most limited access to employment or employability services in Canada. **(Bernadette Beaupré, Co-Chair, National Coalition of Community Based Training)**¹⁷³

We have certainly given a thought to EI rebates and we’ve given thought to EI. In fact, it’s one of the issues that we want to discuss with the federal government is whether EI, the EI system can be used in relation to the kinds of incentives that need to be offered. Now that you’ve asked the question, let me just take it a step further and say that the provinces and territories can’t do this on their own because of the financial burden. This has to be in partnership with the federal government. But both with respect to taxation and with respect to EI, we need that kind of partnership. **(Dr. Paul Cappon, Director General, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada)**¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Government of Canada, *National Summit on Innovation and Learning: Summary*, 2002, Appendix 3, p. 88.

¹⁷³ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:55), Meeting No. 24, 10 April 2003.

¹⁷⁴ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:40), Meeting No. 28, 6 May 2003.

The sector council community would welcome a more coordinated approach to literacy and essential skills programs. As you are fully aware, this becomes a major challenge in a country with split jurisdiction in areas like education and training and lacking a national approach or policy on education training or literacy ... [we need] a national commitment to program and funding support on a long-term and sustainable basis to permit sector councils and others to design and implement more workplace literacy programs on a national and sectoral basis, including an ability to assess effectiveness and results. **(Gary Grenman, Executive Director, The Alliance of Sector Councils)**¹⁷⁵

With the introduction of the *Employment Insurance Act* in 1996, access to training (and other active measures designed to facilitate labour market adjustments) changed significantly. Access to training became more limited due to changes in eligibility, funding and delivery mechanisms. Eligibility for EI Part II benefits, collectively called Employment Benefits and Support Measures (EBSMs), requires individuals to be currently eligible for EI, to have received regular benefits in the past 36 months or to have received maternity/parental benefits in the past 60 months. Needless to say, many unemployed individuals are denied access to EBSMs.

EI Part II benefits are delivered under Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs). LMDAs are bilateral agreements between the federal and provincial/territorial governments, save Ontario. Under “devolved” agreements (signed by Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, New Brunswick, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut) EI Part II funds are transferred to signatory provinces and territories to design and deliver programs that are similar to EBSMs. In this case, HRDC cannot prescribe spending priorities or how funds are delivered. Under co-managed or non-devolved agreements (signed by British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island and the Yukon), provincial/territorial signatories deliver EBSMs jointly with HRDC. Nova Scotia delivers EI Part II benefits via a “strategic partnership” agreement with HRDC.

The funding limit for EBSMs in any given year is determined by the *Employment Insurance Act* and is set at 0.8% of total estimated insurable earnings. In 2003-2004, planned spending on EBSMs is expected to be \$2.2 billion, roughly \$872 million less than that allowed under the Act.

The terms and conditions of EBSMs do not support literacy training per se, although it is thought that some jurisdictions with co-managed agreements and Ontario integrate some literacy training into their programming. In any event, it is safe to conclude that investments in literacy skills under LMDAs are extremely uncommon and sporadic. Given that these agreements are the only funding mechanism currently available, we believe that access to EBSMs, and in particular literacy training, must be greatly enhanced. Every year the budget for these measures is well below that permitted under the Act, despite the fact that unemployment remains high and the government is pursuing a learning agenda.

¹⁷⁵ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (16:40), Meeting No. 23, 8 April 2003.

Most members of the Committee believe that EI is underutilized as a mechanism for addressing this country's low literacy problem. We believe that access to EBSMs must be significantly enhanced, especially in terms of allowing access by unemployed people, irrespective of their current or historical attachment to EI benefits. While some Committee members maintain that frequent EI users with low literacy skills should be required to take literacy training as a condition of benefits, we are mindful of the resistance that this concept received during our review of Canada's social security system back in the mid-1990s. Thus, most of us think that access to EBSMs should continue to be voluntary.

We fully appreciate that broader access to literacy-related initiatives financed through EI contributions represents a significant departure from the current situation, and that this might require a legislative change.¹⁷⁶ There is also a concern that if some of the provinces and territories do not agree to deliver literacy-related funding, this could produce irregularities in a supposedly pan-Canadian approach to addressing workplace literacy. We doubt that this would happen, since the provincial/territorial labour market ministers and ministers of education have already called on the federal government to invest more heavily in LMDAs by increasing Part II funding by \$700 million and by increasing Consolidated Revenue Fund expenditures to broaden the range of individuals served.¹⁷⁷ As both levels of government recognize the existence of the problem, earmarking additional funding for workplace literacy would, in our view, be well received by the provinces and territories.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the National Literacy Secretariat continue to promote and develop partnerships that pool resources and utilize best practices for creating opportunities for workplace literacy.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that the federal government increase spending under Part II of the *Employment Insurance Act* by \$100 million. Subject to the terms of a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development, the government should negotiate supplementary Labour Market Development Agreements and enact the necessary changes to the *Employment Insurance Act* to provide literacy and numeracy skills development assistance to all

¹⁷⁶ One way to avoid a legislative change in this regard might be to ensure that the premium rate-setting process, currently under review, provide a year-end surplus that is big enough to finance literacy training for individuals who cannot meet the current definition of "insured participant". These funds could then be delivered outside of the purview of EI in the same way that the so-called EI reserve has been spent.

¹⁷⁷ Provincial-Territorial Labour Market Ministers and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, *Working Together to Strengthen Learning and the Labour Market*, July 2002, p. 3.

unemployed and employed individuals, irrespective of their historical attachment to Employment Insurance. These supplementary agreements should ensure that a certain proportion of funding is made available to address the literacy needs of members of designated groups. Seventy-five percent of the increase in Part II funding should be allocated to supplementary Labour Market Development Agreements, while the remaining 25% should be allocated to addressing workplace literacy needs as identified by sector councils. [Note: The reference to a pan-Canadian accord is intended to mean that the federal government should try to reach unanimous agreement with the provinces and territories to address this nation's serious low literacy skills problem. If unanimous agreement is not possible, the Committee encourages the federal government to work with individual provinces and territories to achieve the same results. In either case, since this issue falls within the constitutional domain of the provinces and territories, an agreement is required to formalize federal support.]

Recommendation 21

Subject to an agreement with the provinces and territories, the Committee recommends that the federal government implement a two-year pilot project that offers small and medium-sized businesses an Employment Insurance premium rebate and other incentives such as tax credits to cover the costs of providing workplace literacy and numeracy skills development to employees. Following the completion of this pilot project, an evaluation should be conducted; if the pilot project is deemed successful, it should be extended to all employers, with a continuing emphasis on small and medium-sized businesses.

CONCLUSION

The 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey clearly demonstrated that Canada has a serious low literacy skill problem: it found that an estimated eight million individuals 16 years of age and older lacked the necessary literacy skills to participate fully in Canadian society. This situation entails significant economic and social costs for those with low literacy skills and also for the country as a whole, since it is well known that low literacy skills adversely affect employment, earnings, health, social interaction and civil participation, to name just a few critical aspects of everyday life.

In the words of one witness, imagine a Canada where everyone reads and writes; where all children have people who read to them every day; where people who have difficulty reading and writing feel valued and supported; where language is plain; where literacy organizations have the resources to serve the literacy needs of their communities; where literacy in all its forms is celebrated and supported; and a Canada where a pan-Canadian literacy strategy facilitates the accomplishment of all of this.¹⁷⁸ This is the Committee's dream too, and we urge the federal government to realize this dream by taking immediate action to implement the recommendations in our report. We believe it is time for the federal government to play a leadership role, to strengthen federal/provincial/territorial literacy partnerships, and to help develop a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development.

The Committee was encouraged by the Honourable Jane Stewart, Minister of Human Resources Development Canada, to undertake this study. We have done so and learned that there is much to do. We now encourage her to move forward with vigour and perseverance to address this very important policy issue.

Finally, all members of the Committee wish to express their sincerest appreciation for the time and knowledge that our witnesses and other individuals who submitted briefs have shared with us. Without their thoughtful consideration, commitment and dedication to this critical issue, our report would not have been possible. We believe this report reflects their views and many of their recommendations. The Committee hopes that these recommendations will help to enhance the profile of literacy in Canada and to devise the appropriate policy measures for ensuring that Canadians have the necessary literacy skills to function fully in society.

¹⁷⁸ HRDSPD, *Evidence* (15:25), Meeting No. 18, 20 March 2003.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER 2 — TIME FOR LEADERSHIP

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Minister of Human Resources Development Canada meet with provincial/territorial ministers of education and labour market ministers to develop a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development. Key elements of this accord should identify provinces and territories as having primary responsibility for education and labour market training, establish joint funding levels and funding duration, determine the means of delivery, set goals, identify the need for flexibility in establishing literacy priorities, and establish methods for evaluating outcomes. If a pan-Canadian accord is not possible, the Government of Canada should negotiate bilateral literacy accords with all interested provincial and territorial governments. [Note: The reference to a pan-Canadian accord is intended to mean that the federal government should try to reach unanimous agreement with the provinces and territories to address this nation's serious low literacy skills problem. If unanimous agreement is not possible, the Committee encourages the federal government to work with individual provinces and territories to achieve the same results. In either case, since this issue falls within the constitutional domain of the provinces and territories, an agreement is required to formalize federal support.]

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that:

- The federal government formulate a literacy policy applicable to all federal departments and agencies, establish clear program objectives and goals, and conduct a government-wide inventory and review of literacy-specific programs to ensure that program objectives and outcomes are being achieved;
- The federal government assess all government programs and services to ensure that the government's literacy policy and goals are being met (i.e., literacy lens) and that programs and services are accessible to individuals with low literacy skills;

- Treasury Board specifically include literacy and numeracy skills development in its *Policy for Continuous Learning in the Public Service of Canada*. Furthermore, all employees with low literacy skills, irrespective of their employment status, be assisted and encouraged to submit a personal learning plan to raise their literacy and numeracy skills. Moreover, learning opportunities should be made available during working hours;
- The federal government assign primary responsibility to the National Literacy Secretariat to coordinate, monitor and report on federal literacy initiatives and their results.

CHAPTER 3 — COMPONENTS OF A FEDERAL CONTRIBUTION TO PAN-CANADIAN LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

I. RECOGNIZING THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR, EMPLOYERS, EMPLOYEE REPRESENTATIVES AND LEARNERS

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the federal government allocate sufficient resources to provide literacy awards at various points in the year, especially International Literacy Day, to reward literacy providers (e.g., volunteers, employers and other literacy stakeholders) for their significant involvement and excellence in promoting and delivering literacy training, and to celebrate the successes of literacy learners.

II. THE ROLE OF THE CANADIAN LEARNING INSTITUTE

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the federal government include literacy research in the mandate of the Canadian Learning Institute. It is the Committee's view that the assignment of literacy research activities to the Canadian Learning Institute should not reduce the National Literacy Secretariat's annual budget for grants and contribution programs.

III. ASSESSING PRIOR LEARNING AND RESURRECTING THE CONCEPT OF A LEARNING PASSPORT

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that funds be allocated through the National Literacy Secretariat to encourage greater use of prior learning assessments for low literacy learners.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the federal government work with provincial and territorial governments and the learning community to develop a format for a learning portfolio that records individuals' formal and informal learning, and that respects the privacy of individuals. It is hoped that this document would identify learners' strengths and knowledge gaps, and provide a basis on which to build for those who engage in further learning. Although this recommendation is primarily intended to encourage and facilitate training among individuals with low literacy credentials, there is no reason to limit the use of this credential recognition document to low literacy learners. In fact, an obvious extension of this approach could include the learning accomplishments, including language instruction, of newcomers to Canada.

IV. DESIGNING AN ABORIGINAL LITERACY STRATEGY

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the federal government immediately begin consultations with the Aboriginal communities, and provincial and territorial governments, to develop an Aboriginal Literacy Strategy that: incorporates a holistic approach; respects Aboriginal languages, traditions and values; and is funded at a level commensurate with the seriousness of the problem of low literacy among Aboriginal peoples.

Recommendation 8

The Committee anticipates that the implementation of an Aboriginal Literacy Strategy will take some time. In the interim, the Committee recommends that a new National Literacy Secretariat funding stream be created—the Aboriginal Funding Stream. In addition to the amount currently being spent (approximately \$2 million) through the National Literacy Secretariat on Aboriginal literacy projects, the government

should allocate \$5 million to this new funding stream, of which one-half should be delivered through the national Aboriginal literacy organization that is currently being established by the National Aboriginal Design Committee, while the remainder should be delivered via the existing funding streams, as is currently being done.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the federal government allocate \$15 million to supplementary Aboriginal Human Resources Development Agreements to fund Aboriginal workplace literacy initiatives. In addition, some of the new funding (i.e., \$25 million over the next two years) to be delivered under the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership should be earmarked for literacy and numeracy skills development in major projects across the country. Furthermore, all federal programs aimed at increasing labour market participation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada should include basic education upgrading and literacy programs.

V. BUILDING CAPACITY, STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS AND DEVELOPING NEW APPROACHES

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that:

- The National Literacy Secretariat's annual grants and contributions budget be increased from \$28.2 million to \$50 million. This increase does not include new funding for the proposed Aboriginal Funding Stream. New funding should continue to be delivered through the National Funding Stream and the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Funding Stream, including the agreement with Quebec, and should respect any other conditions that may be specified following an agreement on a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development. [Note: The reference to a pan-Canadian accord is intended to mean that the federal government should try to reach unanimous agreement with the provinces and territories to address this nation's serious low literacy skills problem. If unanimous agreement is not possible, the Committee encourages the federal government to work with individual provinces and territories to achieve the same results. In either case, since this issue falls within the constitutional domain of the provinces and territories, an agreement is required to formalize federal support.];

- **One-third of the increase in funding be allocated to eligible projects for a multi-year period in order to assess the impact of stable funding on the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills;**
- **The National Literacy Secretariat use its extensive partnership network to examine the extent to which the demand for literacy training exceeds supply;**
- **The National Literacy Secretariat be sensitive to the literacy needs of francophone adults in view of the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey which found a higher incidence of low literacy among francophone adults compared to anglophone adults;**
- **The National Literacy Secretariat develop, in conjunction with literacy providers, clear, measurable goals, objectives and performance indicators for assessing individual's literacy and numeracy skills, to be reported on by recipients of NLS funding. Once these performance indicators are developed, Human Resources Development Canada should report on these each year in its Performance Report.**

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the National Literacy Secretariat:

- **Expand support for community learning and family literacy partnerships;**
- **Develop distance learning educational material and facilitate projects that make access to literacy training more equitable for those who reside in remote parts of the country or prefer not to pursue literacy training in institutional settings;**
- **Promote and support more literacy initiatives that involve the participation of public libraries, a key contributor to literacy promotion and development in our communities.**

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the federal government continue to promote and support the development and evolution of learning networks that enable communities to build learning capacity through the use of network technologies.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that:

- As part of a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy, the federal government, in agreement with the provinces and territories, consider redirecting some of the funds allocated to the Youth Employment Strategy to support further education among young early school leavers through a “learn and earn” initiative that results in at least high school completion [Note: The reference to a pan-Canadian accord is intended to mean that the federal government should try to reach unanimous agreement with the provinces and territories to address this nation’s serious low literacy skills problem. If unanimous agreement is not possible, the Committee encourages the federal government to work with individual provinces and territories to achieve the same results. In either case, since this issue falls within the constitutional domain of the provinces and territories, an agreement is required to formalize federal support.];**
- The National Literacy Secretariat restore its Literacy Corps budget to \$1 million starting in 2004-2005;**
- The Government of Canada continue to provide sufficient financial support for the pan-Canadian assessment of students’ literacy skills.**

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that some of the National Literacy Secretariat’s new resources for stable funding be allocated to literacy projects for persons with learning disabilities, in recognition of the fact that many individuals with learning disabilities need long-term literacy assistance for which multi-year funding would be appropriate.

Recommendation 15

The Committee recommends that the comprehensive agreement that is currently being negotiated with the provinces and territories to remove barriers to participation in work and learning for persons with disabilities include literacy and numeracy skills development as key components.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the federal government expand the budget (i.e., \$23.8 million in 2003-2004) of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities by \$5 million and dedicate additional funding to literacy and numeracy skills development.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that:

- Citizenship and Immigration Canada review its budget for Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada to ensure that sufficient funding is available to help individuals, including those with second-language literacy needs, overcome difficulties entering the labour market because they lack official language skills. Any additional funding must also be reflected in funding under the settlement agreements with Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia;**
- The level and duration of language instruction provided under Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada be assessed to ensure that it is meeting the needs of immigrants and refugees;**
- Funding be made available to provide supplementary services, such as transportation and child care, to assist newcomers who are unable to access language instruction because they lack the necessary supports.**

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that, as part of a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development, the federal government work in partnership with provincial and territorial governments to ensure that enough resources are available to meet the literacy and numeracy skills

development needs of inmates across the country. This should include funding to permit inmates to make the transition to community literacy programs once they are released. [Note: The reference to a pan-Canadian accord is intended to mean that the federal government should try to reach unanimous agreement with the provinces and territories to address this nation's serious low literacy skills problem. If unanimous agreement is not possible, the Committee encourages the federal government to work with individual provinces and territories to achieve the same results. In either case, since this issue falls within the constitutional domain of the provinces and territories, an agreement is required to formalize federal support.]

VI. LITERACY AND THE WORKPLACE

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the National Literacy Secretariat continue to promote and develop partnerships that pool resources and utilize best practices for creating opportunities for workplace literacy.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that the federal government increase spending under Part II of the *Employment Insurance Act* by \$100 million. Subject to the terms of a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development, the government should negotiate supplementary Labour Market Development Agreements and enact the necessary changes to the *Employment Insurance Act* to provide literacy and numeracy skills development assistance to all unemployed and employed individuals, irrespective of their historical attachment to Employment Insurance. These supplementary agreements should ensure that a certain proportion of funding is made available to address the literacy needs of members of designated groups. Seventy-five percent of the increase in Part II funding should be allocated to supplementary Labour Market Development Agreements, while the remaining 25% should be allocated to addressing workplace literacy needs as identified by sector councils. [Note: The reference to a pan-Canadian accord is intended to mean that the federal government should try to reach unanimous agreement with the provinces and territories to address this nation's serious low literacy skills problem. If unanimous agreement is not possible, the Committee encourages the federal government to work with individual provinces and territories to achieve

the same results. In either case, since this issue falls within the constitutional domain of the provinces and territories, an agreement is required to formalize federal support.]

Recommendation 21

Subject to an agreement with the provinces and territories, the Committee recommends that the federal government implement a two-year pilot project that offers small and medium-sized businesses an Employment Insurance premium rebate and other incentives such as tax credits to cover the costs of providing workplace literacy and numeracy skills development to employees. Following the completion of this pilot project, an evaluation should be conducted; if the pilot project is deemed successful, it should be extended to all employers, with a continuing emphasis on small and medium-sized businesses.

APPENDIX A — CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS CHARACTERIZING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION/LITERACY NATIONWIDE¹

- 1899-1930s** Adult Basic Education (ABE) was not significantly distinguished from other adult education initiatives, which were carried out through YMCAs and YWCAs, Mechanic's Institutes, churches, labour unions, farm organizations, travelling circuit lecturers and teachers, etc.
- 1899** Canadian Reading Camp Movement was founded.
- 1922** Canadian Reading Camp Movement becomes Frontier College 1922. Frontier College sent university students to the Canadian wilderness to teach labourers, mostly lumberjacks and miners, how to read and write.
- 1935** Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE), the first national organization dedicated solely to the field of adult education, was founded as a clearing house to serve professionals in the field. It became a developer of educational programs with a focus on citizenship, dedicated to informing adults about political, social and economic issues. It was the main source of adult education publications until the 1950s and nurtured some of the early researchers who separated out for study high-school-equivalent education (sometimes referred to as ABE in Canada) and pre-high-school-equivalent education (sometimes referred to as literacy education). CAAE helped create a number of other organizations devoted to adult learning and literacy, including the Canadian Commission for the Community College, founded in 1968, which later became the Association of Canadian Community Colleges; the Movement for Canadian Literacy, founded in 1977; and the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, founded in 1979. The CAAE's leadership role diminished in the late 1980s, and it folded in the mid-1990s.
- 1960s** This decade was characterized by idealistic social consciousness and nationalist feeling in Canada and in Quebec, waves of immigration, and broad social reforms

¹ By Linda Shohet, Executive Director, The Centre for Literacy of Quebec (See: The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, "Literacy Across the Curriculummedia", *Focus*, Vol. 16, No. 1, p. 4 to 7.).

such as a “war on poverty.” Means of waging the “war on poverty” included expanded federal funding for technical and vocational education, which led to the exposure of under-education among adults.

1960

The *Technical and Vocational Training Assistance Act* authorized Ottawa to join the provinces in funding capital costs for vocational training facilities. Within six years, projects valued at more than \$1.5 billion provided 662 new schools and 439,952 student placements. Because of federal-provincial conflict over roles, and differences between Quebec and other provinces, this Act was the last federal investment in capital and operating costs for technical and vocational education. Many institutes of technology created through this act were converted to community colleges.

1967

The *Adult Occupational Training Act* was passed, focusing on unemployed and underemployed workers and on short-term retraining. It led to the development of the Canada Newstart Program, creating six private nonprofit corporations to promote “experimentation in methods which would motivate and train adults who were educationally disadvantaged.” Without intending to, the program revealed that a number of Canadian adults were not educated enough to qualify for retraining. This put the need for adult basic education out in the open for the first time.

1969

The *Official Languages Act* led to an explosion of second-language teaching across the country and further contributed to awareness of the large numbers of undereducated adults.

Late 1960s/Early 1970

Federal Basic Training and Skills Development (BTSD) and early Basic Job Readiness Training (BJRT) are developed to target adults who could be trained or retrained in short-term programs leading directly to jobs. BTSD was intended to provide the elementary and high school levels of education that were prerequisites for vocational training.

1970s

This decade was characterized by a retrenchment in spending on adult learning and literacy. After reviews of the BTSD and BJRT showed these programs were not meeting the anticipated goals of skills training, funds were restricted, and by the end of the decade “provision for the most undereducated adults had almost ceased to exist” (Thomas, 1983, p. 65). Simultaneously, a series of provincial reports and commissions highlighted the needs of illiterate and undereducated adults. Other national reports from various government committees (such as the Senate Committee on Poverty in 1971 and the Senate Finance Committee in 1976) raised the same concern in the context of other social issues. The first major study of illiteracy in Canada was written, and the first organization dedicated exclusively to adult learning and literacy was founded. A concern for literacy as a social justice issue was dominant among activists.

1970

First Laubach tutor training workshop offered in Canada. Laubach councils are set up across the country during the next decade.

1976

Adult Basic Education in Canada and Literacy Activities in Canada 1975/76, written by Audrey M. Thomas for World Literacy of Canada, provided the first detailed analysis of illiteracy in the country. It used census data on school grade completion to estimate the number of adults in need and collected all available data on provision across the country from federal and provincial sources and from numerous organizations of different types — government, research and community-based.

1977

First national conference on literacy, held in Ottawa, brought together key people in the field and leads to the creation of the Movement for Canadian Literacy to advocate for the cause.

1979

Report of the Commission of Enquiry on Educational Leave and Productivity (for the Minister of Labour) included recommendations on adult illiteracy, calling for incentives and the establishment of an adult education fund that would offer grants to employers, trade unions, educational organizations and individual workers to upgrade basic skills. While this fund did not materialize, the recommendations contributed to setting the stage for a federal response to adult literacy.

- 1980s** Characterized by an increasing number of federal government department reports either mentioning or focusing on adult illiteracy as a social and economic issue. Provinces studied the issue, developed policies and expanded provision of innovative services (in the community-based and institutional sectors), although there was little coordination within different provincial departments funding different types of services.
- 1981** Laubach Literacy of Canada was established to coordinate and represent the Laubach Reading Councils across the country.
- 1983** *Adult Illiteracy in Canada-A Challenge*, an occasional paper for the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, written by Audrey Thomas, was released. The most comprehensive national assessment yet produced in Canada, it presented the problem in the context of world literacy and characterized the Canadian situation as one of undereducated adults. Thomas described provincial and federal activities as well as those in the volunteer sector and pointed out the fragmentation of services. The juxtaposition of data on labour force participation, educational attainment and training activities was effective in making connections between the social justice and economic motives of literacy advocates. The paper also identified groups in need of specialized response; these included the incarcerated, indigenous people, persons with disabilities, immigrants, women, the elderly and school dropouts, thus emphasizing that adults with literacy problems were not a homogenous group.
- 1985** A CAAE report, *Educationally Disadvantaged Adults: A Project*, contributed to the pressure for government action on literacy.
- 1986** On October 1, in the Speech from the Throne, the federal government pledged to “work with the provinces, the private sector and the voluntary groups to develop resources to ensure that Canadians have access to the literacy skills that are the prerequisite for participation in our advanced economy.” The task of developing a national strategy within the federal jurisdiction fell to the Department of the Secretary of State, which began a lengthy process of consultation with all possible stakeholders.

In a December meeting at a site called Cedar Glen, a coalition of national groups promoting literacy in the volunteer sector crafted a public policy statement. The Cedar Glen Declaration was published as an open letter to the prime minister and provincial and territorial premiers and leaders. It marked the beginning of a public awareness campaign and a new point in the literacy movement when national organizations could speak with common cause.

1987

The Southam newspaper chain commissioned a survey by the Creative Research Group, and published a series of articles on adult illiteracy in Canada. (The articles were reprinted in a monograph by Peter Calamai titled *Broken Words: Why Five Million Canadians Are Illiterate*. This was the first assessment in Canada to test literacy using “real tasks” rather than by extrapolating literacy levels from years of schooling. The Southam survey shocked the country and brought the issue to public attention.

National Literacy Secretariat founded to fund literacy initiatives.

1988

A study by the Canadian Business Task Force on Literacy estimated the annual cost to business of illiteracy in the workforce at \$4 billion and the cost to society at \$10 billion. The group hypothesized that many errors required work to be redone and that many accidents in the workplace resulting in loss of life or property could be attributable to illiteracy. Although the text contained a disclaimer about the accuracy of the estimates, very few people read the disclaimer; only the figures made headlines. Publicity about the costs of illiteracy, added to all the other discourse, contributed to a government decision to take action.

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, responded to the 1986 Throne Speech by commissioning its own survey of literacy and ABE. The resulting report, *Adult Illiteracy in Canada*, published in February 1988, outlined provincial programs and policies where they existed (see Cairns, 1988). These descriptions were taken directly from provincial government documents. The analysis updated and expanded the themes of the 1976 and 1983 Thomas reports. Lifelong learning is a theme.

Prime Minister announces a federal national literacy strategy with funding of \$110 million over five years.

1989

The National Adult Literacy Database, ABC Canada, and the Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français are created.

The National Literacy Secretariat funded the national *Survey of Literacy Skills Used in Daily Life (LSUDA)*, a well-respected and widely read report on literacy in Canada. This was the first official document *not* to use the word illiteracy.

1990s

An infrastructure was created to support literacy activities across Canada, including resource centres, electronic networks and communication systems, and provincial and territorial coalitions, all funded partially or entirely by the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS). The NLS, through funding more than 4,500 projects, supported the creation of teaching materials and increased support for academic and community-based research. While most provinces and territories increased spending on adult literacy education, provision of services to students remained inconsistent from one part of the country to another. (See Hoddinott, 1998). The decade ended with attempts to assess, consolidate, and share the best of what has been developed (See Barker, 1999), with repeated references to a future model of lifelong learning.

1994

Adult Literacy Survey, conducted by Statistics Canada in partnership with the OECD in seven countries, including Canada, provided an updated profile of literacy in Canada.

1997

The federal government increases the annual allocation of the NLS to \$30 million and targets the additional money to family literacy, workplace literacy and new technology. The move was seen as a sign of continuing federal commitment, which some in the literacy field had feared might end at the close of the decade when the UNESCO International Decade of Literacy came to an end. Responsibility for training was devolved to the provinces, removing one of the potential mechanisms for directing federal funds into adult basic education.

1999-2000

Most provincial and territorial governments expanded policy statements on adult literacy or developed positions, if they did not already have one. However provision to learners did not increase in most parts of the country.

2001

January Speech from the Throne pledged an increased commitment to skills and learning with a specific mention of literacy: "Today, many Canadian adults lack the higher literacy skills needed in the new economy. The Government of Canada will invite the provinces and territories, along with the private sector and voluntary organizations, to launch a national initiative with the goal of significantly increasing the proportion of adults with those higher-level skills."

Federal policy makers began to study the issue to deepen their understanding before defining how that commitment would be implemented. National literacy organizations and provincial umbrella groups mobilized to lobby for a more coherent "system" of ABE across the country. By the end of the year, no federal policy had been announced.

2002

Combating Canada's low literacy problem surfaced again in the 30 September 2002 Speech from the Throne, when the federal government indicated that it would build on its investments in human capital, including literacy.

On 18 and 19 November 2002, participants at the National Summit on Innovation and Learning, adopted 18 priority recommendations one of which included the establishment of "a pan-Canadian literacy and essential skills development system, supported by federal, provincial and territorial governments. Establish programs to improve literacy and basic skills based on individual and community needs and interests."

APPENDIX B LIST OF WITNESSES

Associations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Department of Human Resources Development Lenore Burton, Director General, Learning and Literacy Directorate Jane Stewart, Minister	30/01/2003	9
Canadian Public Health Association Deborah Gordon-EI-Bihbety, Director	04/02/2003	10
Learning Disabilities Association of Canada Elizabeth Gayda, Past President		
National Aboriginal Design Committee Priscilla George, Coordinator		
Centre for Literacy of Quebec Linda Shohet, Executive Director	06/02/2003	11
Conference Board of Canada Michael Bloom, Director		
FuturEd Consulting Education Futurists Inc. Kathryn Barker, President		
St. Christopher House Susan Pigott, Chief Executive Officer		
ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation Christine Featherstone, President	11/02/2003	12
“Fédération canadienne pour l’alphabétisation en français” Luce Lapierre, Executive Director		
“Fondation pour l’alphabétisation” Sophie Labrecque, Chief Executive Officer		
Frontier College John O’Leary, President		
Laubach Literacy of Canada Robin Jones, Executive Director		
Movement for Canadian Literacy Wendy DesBrisay, Executive Director		

Associations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) Charles Ramsey, Executive Director	18/03/2003	17
Statistics Canada Scott Murray, Director General, Institutions and Social Statistics		
Alberta Literacy Elaine Cairns, Vice-President	20/03/2003	18
British Columbia Literacy Jean Rasmussen, Director		
Literacy Partners of Manitoba Marg Rose, Executive Director		
North West Territories Literacy Council Kate Sills, Executive Director		
New Brunswick Coalition for Literacy Ian Thorn, Coordinator	25/03/2003	19
Nunavut Literacy Council Cayla Chenier, Literacy Development Coordinator		
Ontario Literacy Coalition Sue Folinsbee, Acting Co-Executive Director		
“Regroupement des groupes populaires en Alphabétisation du Québec” Christian Pelletier, Coordinator		
Calgary Board of Education Irene La Pierre, Principal	27/03/2003	20
Chief Dan George Centre for Advanced Education (Simon Fraser University) Darrell Mounsey, Executive Director		
Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey Murdena Marshall, Retired Associate Professor		
Peterborough Native Learning Centre Karen McClain, Instructor		
St. Anne's School Coone, Newfoundland Edwina Wetzel, Director of Education		
Congress of Aboriginal Peoples Alastair Macphee, Consultant	01/04/2003	21

Associations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations Danette Starr-Spaeth, Executive Director, Education and Training Secretariat	01/04/2003	21
Avon Foods Inc. Albert (Allie) Craswell, Plant Manager	03/04/2003	22
“Commission scolaire de Montréal” Françoise Grenon, Teaching Consultant		
Durabelt Inc. Ruth Rogerson, Field Officer		
La Ronge Motor Hotel, Saskatchewan Clarence Neault, General Manager		
National Silicates Lynda Ryder, Director		
Palliser Furniture Valerie Unwin, Language Training Coordinator		
Canadian Auto Workers Union Laurell Ritchie, National Representative	08/04/2003	23
Canadian Labour Congress Kenneth Georgetti, President Tamara Levine, Co-ordinator		
The Alliance of Sector Councils Gary Grenman, Executive Director		
Alpha Plus Ellen Long, Senior Researcher	10/04/2003	24
Association of Canadian Community Colleges Gerald Brown, President		
Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment Bonnie Kennedy, A/Executive Director		
Canadian Library Association Don Butcher, Executive Director Madeleine Lefebvre, Vice-President		
National Coalition of Community Based Training Bernadette Beaupré, Co-Chair		
Prior Learning Assessment Center, Halifax Doug Myers, Executive Director		

Associations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Correctional Service Canada Don Head, Senior Deputy Commissioner	29/04/2003	25
Department of Citizenship and Immigration Rosaline Frith, Director General		
John Howard Society of Canada Graham Stewart, Executive Director		
Maytree Foundation Elizabeth McIsaac, Manager		
Y Women of Montreal France-Line Carbonneau, Coordinator Zaïa Ferani, Project Leader		
Department of Human Resources Development Lenore Burton, Director General, Learning and Literacy Directorate Yvette Y. Souque, Program Manager, National Literacy Secretariat	01/05/2003	26
Council of Ministers of Education (Canada) Paul Cappon, Director General	06/05/2003	28

APPENDIX C LIST OF BRIEFS

ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation
Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment
Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres
Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators
Canadian Library Association
“Fondation pour l’alphabétisation”
FuturEd Consulting Education Futurists Inc.
John Howard Society of Canada
Learners Advisory Network
“Le Y des femmes de Montréal”
Literacy Alberta
Literacy Network Supporting People with Disabilities
Movement for Canadian Literacy
Nokee Kwe Skills Development & BASA
Nunavut Literacy Council
Statistics Canada
Textiles Human Resources Council
University of Saskatchewan

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report within one hundred and fifty (150) days.

Copies of the relevant Minutes of Proceedings of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (*Meetings Nos. 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 33, 34, 35 and 36 which includes this report*) are tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Judi Longfield, M.P.
Chair

DISSENTING OPINION BY THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Report on Literacy by the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

The Bloc Québécois cannot give its support to the report on literacy by the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities entitled *Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need For A Pan-Canadian Action*. A number of the report's recommendations are not consistent with constitutional areas of provincial and territorial jurisdiction, particularly education and knowledge acquisition. For example, **Recommendation 13** states that:

As part of a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy, the federal government, in agreement with the provinces and territories, consider redirecting some of the funds allocated to the Youth Employment Strategy to support further education among young early school leavers through a "learn and earn" initiative that results in at least high school completion.¹

Early school leaving and secondary education are issues that are under the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces and territories. The federal government is not involved in these matters in any way and the report's recommendations should respect the division of powers among the various levels of government.

Moreover, the government of Quebec has been asking for the past few years for the funds (\$70 million) earmarked for the Youth Employment Strategy to be transferred to Quebec, because a number of programs under this federal strategy are identical to programs in Quebec. It is illogical to ask the federal government to duplicate its programs still further.

Concerted action

The desire expressed throughout the report to create a pan-Canadian accord in order to increase adult literacy is an intrusion into areas of provincial and territorial jurisdiction and appears to reveal a predilection for centralization in education by the federal government. This attitude was shown recently in a speech by the Minister of Finance, John Manley, who asserted that Canada needed a new national Minister of Learning and Innovation.² This statement made to the students in a Vancouver high school speaks volumes about the Liberal Government's determination to interfere once again in the areas of jurisdiction set aside for the provinces and territories.

¹ Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, House of Commons, *Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need For A Pan-Canadian Response*, June 2003, p. 155.

² Presse canadienne, "Manley propose la création d'un ministère national de l'Éducation", *Le Devoir*, 2003-05-30, p. A2.

The Bloc Québécois would like to point out that the rule of law in education belongs exclusively to the provinces and territories. This right includes the right to exercise leadership in the area of literacy for their citizens with federal financial support. The federal government has no reason to take over the leadership in literacy in the provinces and territories, nor should its education initiatives take precedence.

The Bloc Québécois is primarily interested in a bilateral approach to literacy. In this regard, **Recommendation 1** of the committee's report states that "If a pan-Canadian accord is not possible, the Government of Canada should negotiate bilateral literacy accords with all interested provincial and territorial governments."³ The pan-Canadian approach recommended in this report is seen as being a "one-size-fits-all" approach with no room for cultural, linguistic, social and economic differences between the various provinces and territories.

Consequently, the Bloc Québécois would prefer to remove the concept of a pan-Canadian accord and replace it with bilateral agreements containing a clause allowing for opting-out with compensation. The bilateral agreements would make it possible for literacy initiatives, *inter alia*, to be implemented in compliance with the constitutional priorities of the provinces and territories in learning and education.

It is essential to change the title of the report to reflect the constitutional areas of provincial and territorial jurisdiction. The current version promotes a "pan-Canadian" approach. The Bloc Québécois suggests that the report be entitled "Raising Adult Literacy Skills: the Need for a Joint Action." Displaying this title, the report would be a prelude to the search for a collaborative rather than a confrontational approach. Moreover, any reference in the text to a "pan-Canadian agreement" should be dropped and replaced by "bilateral agreements" (including the right to opt out with compensation).

Furthermore, the Bloc Québécois is against the creation of the Canadian Learning Institute. In the February 2003 budget, the Canadian government announced \$100 million for the institute before it had even determined its organizational structure, its management framework or its mandate. Bloc Québécois MPs are of the view that the creation of this institute is pointless and futile, and, moreover, that it would be an expensive and ineffective duplication of the National Literacy Secretariat. Why set up additional administrative structures when there is already a federal organization - the National Literacy Secretariat - that is responsible for distributing funds for literacy under existing bilateral agreements? The money could be used for training instead of being wasted on creating new organizations.

In this regard, the Bloc Québécois recommends that the funds earmarked for the creation of the Canadian Learning Institute be redirected toward the National Literacy Secretariat, and that the Secretariat's mandate be broadened, if necessary, to include the

³ Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, House of Commons, *Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need For A Pan-Canadian Response*, June 2003, p. 145.

mandate which the government was planning to give the Canadian Learning Institute. The National Literacy Secretariat appears to have proven its worth, according to the evidence heard during the Standing Committee's meetings. A number of witnesses in fact told committee members that the National Literacy Secretariat performed its role effectively, but that it lacked funds. The Bloc Québécois does not see the need to set up a new organization and has not yet been convinced that it is even relevant.

In addition, the Bloc Québécois has questions about the Canadian Learning Institute being set up:

- What are the government's real intentions for this institute?
- Where will the institute's operating budget come from in the years following its creation?
- Will institute researchers be eligible for grants from the Granting Councils or the Innovation Foundation?

Nonetheless, the Bloc Québécois acknowledges how important it is to increase funding for literacy in Canada and is delighted by the desire expressed by committee members to give priority to literacy and essential skills development. As literacy is closely associated with language and culture, both of which are provincial and territorial matters, the Bloc Québécois believes that the government of Quebec is in a better position to assess its own literacy needs.

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, June 9, 2003
(Meeting No. 35)

The Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities met *in camera* at 3:25 p.m. this day, in Room 269, West Block, the Chair, Judi Longfield, presiding.

Members of the Committee present: Eugène Bellemare, Monique Guay, Tony Ianno, Judi Longfield, Gurbax Malhi, Monte Solberg.

Acting Members present: Bob Wood for Peter Adams, Sébastien Gagnon for Suzanne Tremblay, Lynne Yelich for Jim Gouk, Joseph Volpe for Larry McCormick and Larry Bagnell for Diane St-Jacques.

In attendance: From the Library of Parliament: Chantal Collin and Kevin Kerr, research officers.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the Committee resumed its study on literacy.

The Committee proceeded to discuss its draft report on literacy.

At 3:58 p.m., the sitting was suspended.

At 4:15 p.m., the sitting resumed.

It was agreed, — That the final report (as amended) on “Raising Adult Literacy Skills: the Need for a Pan-Canadian Response” be adopted as the Third Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities.

It was agreed, — That the Clerk be authorized to make such editorial and typographical changes as necessary without changing the substance of the report.

It was agreed, — That the Chair be authorized to table the report in the House.

It was agreed, — That the Committee print 550 copies of its report in a bilingual format.

It was agreed, — That, pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee request that the government provide a comprehensive response to this report within one hundred and fifty (150) days.

It was agreed, — That, pursuant to Standing Order 108(1)(a), the Committee authorizes the printing of the dissenting opinion of the Bloc Québécois as an appendix to this report immediately after the signature of the Chair; that the dissenting opinion be limited to not more than five pages; (font = 12; line spacing = 1.5) and that the dissenting opinion be delivered in electronic format in both official languages to the Clerk of the Committee not later than 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, June 10th.

At 4:16 p.m., the Committee adjourned to the call of the Chair.

Danielle Belisle
Clerk of the Committee