



The Conference Board of Canada

EXPLORING THE LEARNING RECOGNITION GAP IN CANADA

Phase 1 Report

***RECOGNIZING LEARNING:
THE ECONOMIC COSTS OF NOT RECOGNIZING LEARNING
AND LEARNING CREDENTIALS IN CANADA***

Research Project

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Purpose of the Report

Is there a *learning recognition gap* in Canada today? If so, what is it costing Canada?

What economic costs do we bear when we fail to fully recognize people's learning and learning credentials?

Is there a learning recognition gap in Canada today? In other words, is there a difference between the amount of learning that is actually recognized and credentialled in a transferable form and the amount of learning that could potentially be recognized. If there is a gap, what is it costing Canada?

This report explores these questions and the more general question of how important is recognizing learning to the economic well-being of Canada? It asks specifically: ***What economic costs, if any, do we, as individuals, as employers,***

and ultimately, as a society, bear when we fail to fully recognize people's learning and learning credentials?

Learning includes both knowledge and skills, and the attitudes and behaviours that are developed and expressed as a result of having knowledge and skills. *Learning credentials* are the formal documents certifying completion of courses or programs of learning, usually to a defined standard, that are issued by elementary, secondary or post-secondary education institutions, professional or trades supervisory and licensing bodies, or some other publicly sanctioned education or training entity, in Canada or another country.

In one sense, the issue of recognizing learning credentials is a sub-set of the larger issue of recognizing learning. In practice, however, it looms large in the minds of Canadians for whom recognition of learning is inevitably tied to recognition of learning credentials because, at the end of the day, Canada is a credentialling society. Canadians and Canadian organizations have a deep-seated respect for credentials, which we readily use as a proxy for knowledge, skills and attitudes when educating, hiring and training people and in deciding what kind of work they can perform. For this reason, much of the discussion of recognizing learning is framed in the language of credentials. For this reason, too, many of the most serious learning recognition problems faced by Canadians, especially immigrant Canadians, relate to credential recognition difficulties.

Economic costs are not the only focus of this report. It also considers what are the principal:

- Benefits of recognizing learning
- Barriers and solutions to recognizing learning
- Barriers and solutions to improving transferability and mobility of learning

By exploring the types of non-recognition of learning and learning credentials in Canada, through a national literature review, and surveys of stakeholders, and discussing the costs to individuals, institutions, employers and the Canadian economy, this report seeks to shed initial light on these issues.

Working Hypothesis.

Our research hypothesis for the *Recognizing Learning* project is that some people in Canada hold skills and knowledge that are valuable but underused because they are not formally recognized by employers and credential granting organizations. Since recognition of learning through learning credentials is a key to success in the labour market, there are costs associated with the non-recognition of learning. People earn less than they might otherwise, their employers do not gain the full benefits of their abilities, and Canada loses productivity and incurs costs in delivering education and training that people do not need.

This report highlights success stories where institutions and organizations have taken effective action.

The report also seeks to broaden the notion of learning and learning credentials in Canada, and to highlight success stories where institutions and organizations have taken effective action. It briefly examines a wide range of programs and initiatives of public and private education and

training systems that successfully increase recognition and reduce or eliminate the barriers to recognizing and transferring credentials between colleges, universities, businesses and trade groups. It also takes note of provincial government policies and programs to recognize and accredit learning and learning credentials.

Immigrants, Inter-Provincial Transfers and PLAR

An important initial finding from literature review, economic data review and stakeholder survey, is that there are three groups who appear to have the most serious problems in getting their learning recognized, credentialled and accepted for employment and further education. They are immigrants, inter-provincial transferees and persons with prior learning gained in the workplace through experience or training.

Next Phases of Research Project

This report is the first product of *Recognizing Learning: The Economic Costs of Not Recognizing Learning and Learning Credentials in Canada*, a Conference Board of Canada research project. Later stages of the project will test our initial findings and shed further light by examining the number of individuals affected by different aspects of non-recognition and calculate the magnitude of the economic impact on them and on the country as a whole. Findings will be expressed in quantitative terms, using a combination of surveying and economic modeling methods. A final report, in the Spring, 2001, will disseminate the key findings. The research is being undertaken with the active co-operation of governments, employers and educators across Canada.

Project Goals:

The overall project has six broad goals:

1. Raise the public awareness of the importance of recognizing learning and learning credentials and the costs of not recognizing learning.

2. Demonstrate the economic benefits of increasing learning recognition and improving the transferability of credentials.
3. Build support of governments, employers, education organizations and professional associations for improving learning recognition and facilitating the transfer of credits.
4. Provide strategic information for corporate human resource planning to improve recruiting, transfer and promotion outcomes of potential and existing employees.
5. Promote discussion among business, government and education to form learning recognition partnerships.
6. Help to increase the total stock of recognized learning credentials held by people in Canada's labour market.

Why Recognizing Learning Matters – The Big Picture

Recognizing learning became an important economic issue in the 1990s when the demand for people with advanced knowledge and skills grew.

Recognizing learning became an important economic issue in the 1990s when the demand for people with advanced knowledge and skills grew in Canada and other countries around the world. Canada's ability to remain competitive in the global economy depended on how effective it was in developing, attracting and maintaining a world-class labour force. The country's ability to

recognize the full range of peoples' learning and learning credentials, and to transfer credentials within and between educational institutions and workplaces, was – and remains – central to making the most of our labour force in the face of global competition.

Globalization continues to be a major economic force in Canada. It means that Canadian businesses are facing increasing competition at home and abroad. As our economy experiences more international competition it is driven to become more knowledge-based in order to prosper. More than ever, employers depend on knowledgeable and skillful employees to create value-added products and services, efficiently and effectively, so that they can compete successfully. Increasing use of technology in Canadian workplaces is further upping the skills and knowledge requirement for the average Canadian worker.

Changing needs for skills and knowledge are increasingly the norm at a time when over three million Canadians change jobs annually and when hundreds of thousands of secondary school, college and university graduates enter the labour force each year.¹ Increasingly, governments are recognizing that national economic success depends on recognizing people's skills and knowledge, eliminating unnecessary duplication of learning, stimulating lifelong learning, while providing mechanisms that make it easy to

Canada's future depends on informed and educated citizens.

- Joint Ministerial Declaration, 1999
Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)

¹ Thomas Townsend. *Transferability of Learning: A Federal Perspective*, Presentation to the National Council on Education, The Conference Board of Canada, (Toronto: October 5, 1999).

move between education institutions, education and work, and within the workplace. The demographics of our aging population further reinforce the need to make the most of the skills and knowledge of the employees who are already in the nation's workplaces.

Employers, too, are becoming more aware of the opportunity cost of being unable to fully recognize their employees' learning and get that learning recognized by educational and credentialing institutions. Technological and demographic changes in Canada are causing employers to place greater value on knowledge and skills when hiring, transferring, and promoting people to take on and perform jobs today.² The compelling economic and social incentives for individuals, economies and nations to raise their level of education has driven increased participation in a widening range of learning activities by people of all ages. In the Joint Ministerial Declaration of 1999, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for education and training in Canada acknowledged this when they affirmed that the country's future depends on informed and educated citizens.³

Canada's productivity, innovative capacity and quality of life have always been closely linked with the learning of its people. Canada's population is one of the most highly educated in the world. We have traditionally invested heavily in education: in 1994, Canada spent 7.2 per cent of its GDP on education, more than any of the world's other leading economic powers, including the United States, Japan and Germany. Nearly half of all Canadian adults are post-secondary school graduates, by far the highest proportion in the world. And more than two-thirds of all Canadians aged 5-29 are enrolled in an education program.⁴

This trend is likely to continue. As Canada continues to restructure its economy in response to technological and economic changes, a greater weight and emphasis will be placed on the knowledge and skills embodied in individuals and their capacity to learn continuously and apply their learning on the job.⁵

Recognizing learning is an important strategy for drawing on the national talent pool created through continuous learning by adults.

The challenge in this era of expanding, deepening and diversifying demand for learning is how best to meet the volume of demand for the widely varying types of learning that our economy needs in order to grow. Continuous learning by adults in the workplace or elsewhere is one of the least appreciated sources of that learning. Recognizing learning is an important strategy for drawing on the national talent pool created through continuous learning by adults.

² *Performance and Potential 1999*, pp. 9-10, 32-33, 36-38. See also: <http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/tranferability.stm>. The composition of Canada's student body has changed dramatically in recent years. Full-time and part-time university students today are older and more mobile; many full-time students are employed, and most part-time students combine studies and work. Lifelong learning grows more important as more individuals move from school to work and back again

³ Statistics Canada and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. *Education Indicators in Canada: Report of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program 1999*. (Ottawa: Centre for Education Statistics, 2000) p. 1.

⁴ *Performance and Potential 1999*. (Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 1999) pp. 53-54, 95-98.

⁵ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. *Investing in Education: Analysis of the 1999 World Education Indicators*. (UNESCO/OECD World Education Indicators Programme, 2000). p. 9.

Employment of Human Capital

Analysts and policy makers widely agree that appropriately recognizing the full range and extent of knowledge and skills gained through both informal and formal learning channels is becoming more vital as Canada's population and workforce ages. As the workforce ages, proportionately fewer graduates of the formal education system are entering the workforce while skill requirements for new and existing jobs are rising. This makes it even more important for employers to identify, recognize and value the knowledge

Accurate recognition means employers can place their employees in jobs where they can make the maximum contribution, and money and resources are not wasted training employees to create knowledge and skills they already have.

and skills that their current workers already have, and that established workers who change jobs bring to their new jobs.⁶ For the same reason, the argument is increasingly being made that we need to be able to transfer between institutions, jurisdictions and employer organizations the full range of learning credentials that people have obtained and to improve learning recognition systems to create

more holistic learning credentials that accurately capture uncredentialed learning. Accurate recognition means employers can place their employees in jobs where they make the maximum contribution, and money and resources are not wasted training employees to create knowledge and skills they already have.

There are new conditions underlying success. In this high-velocity, knowledge-intensive era human capital is increasingly seen as the fundamental factor in determining the economic well-being of Canadians and improving the performance of organizations.⁷ The demand for skilled workers exceeds the supply in many sectors of the economy.⁸

The *learning recognition gap* is the difference between the amount of learning that is *actually* recognized and credentialled in a transferable form and the amount of learning that could *potentially* be recognized.

Organizations are more likely to thrive in this era when their rate of learning exceeds the rate of change in their competitive environment. To achieve this, organizations must do two things better. First, they must improve the skills of new recruits and current workers. Second, they must find

⁶ *Performance & Potential*, 1999. pp. 54-63.

⁷ ACCC, April 26, 1999. The ACCC argues that for Canada to compete in the global market and be more productive domestically, the labour market requires more advanced skills, and the frequent renewal of skills. Skilled intelligence rapidly is becoming a major source of competitive advantage, wealth and prosperity.

⁸ Jean-Pascal Souque, *Managing Scarce Skills for Competitiveness and Growth: A Review of the Issue*. (Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 1998). Souque reports a growing gap between the skills available in the job market and the skills required by industry. This trend is likely to continue since technology intensive industries, consumers of highly skilled employees, are the fastest growing industries in Canada. In a 1998 Statistics Canada survey of 800 IT companies, 54% of large and 31% of small companies reported vacancies for highly-skilled positions; 88% foresaw an increase in the demand for highly skilled workers. The report predicts a shortfall of 14,680 tradespeople, 42% of the number needed by Ontario manufacturers in 1998-2007, and shortages of physicians and health service providers, tax accountants, management consultants, research and development employees and others across Canada.

ways to better recognize the previous learning and learning credentials of their new recruits and current workers.

The rising opportunity cost for employers, employees and students of being unable to transfer learning and learning credentials is the driving force behind many organizational initiatives. The opportunity cost is rising because employers and society are placing more emphasis on creating a skilled, adaptable workforce that has ample opportunity for continuous learning.⁹ As a recent Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC) report noted, Canadians must commit themselves to learning throughout life. It further argued that the future of Canadian society depends on informed and educated citizens whose full range of knowledge and skills are recognized and used efficiently and comprehensively in Canada's education systems and workplaces.¹⁰

Policies and practices that expand the recognition of prior learning and facilitate the transfer and mobility of learners would help overcome what some see as a growing *learning recognition gap* in Canada. The learning recognition gap is the difference between the amount of learning that is actually recognized and credentialled in a transferable form and the amount of learning that could potentially be recognized.

Concerted efforts are already underway to better assess and recognize prior learning and learning credentials so as to reduce Canada's self-limiting and costly restrictions on its pool of human resources.¹¹ The easier it is for people to access learning, and the more mobility they are afforded by education institutions and workplaces, the more likely they are to upgrade their knowledge and skills on a continuous basis.¹² To achieve this on a large scale may require a pan-Canadian strategy involving both public and private education, organizational training and lifelong learning.

Six Criteria for Valuing Learning

Recent research has shown that Canadians spend a significant amount of time learning outside of formal education environments.¹³ This learning is highly important because all learning holds intrinsic value, whether it takes place in a formal education setting, in the workplace, through life experiences, in a home study setting, in Canada or internationally.

⁹ Lowe, Graham S., and Harvey Krahn, *Job-Related Education and Training Among Younger Workers*, Canadian Public Policy, XXI: 3: 362-378.

¹⁰ CMEC, *A Report on Public Expectations of Post-secondary Education in Canada* (Ottawa, 1999): p. 3.

¹¹ At CMEC cross-Canada roundtables, 1998, most roundtable participants supported improving credit transferability and articulation of college and university programs. While strongly supporting removal of barriers to successful program completion, they were concerned that too much focus on reducing completion times might cause more harm than good. See *Postsecondary Expectations Project – Learner Pathways and Transitions Summary Report*. (CMEC: 1999). pp. 8, 10.

¹² Association of Canadian Community Colleges. *Pan-Canadian Protocol for the Transferability of Learning – Background Paper*. (ACCC: April 26, 1999). <http://www.accc.ca/english/advocacy/priorities/mt-background.htm>.

¹³ Carol Humphries. 'The Iceberg of Informal Learning'. *Canadian Lifelong Learning*, Vol. 2, Issue 1. June 1999. p. 15. This 1998 survey of Canadian lifelong learning examined the extent of adult learning, social barriers to educational courses, and effective ways to link informal learning with organized education and work. Over 95% of respondents had learned informally in the previous year, related to their employment, community volunteer work, household work and other general interests. For those whose informal learning related to employment, two-thirds said they spent on average six hours per week learning. The most common learning activities were job/career general knowledge, employment-related computer & other technology use, new job tasks, problem solving/communication skills, and occupational health & safety.

Its value for the workplace is based on six criteria: authenticity, currency, quality, relevancy, trustworthiness and transferability.¹⁴

Table 1 Six Criteria for Valuing Learning and Learning Credentials	
1. Authenticity	The learner can actually demonstrate the learning or learning credential claimed
2. Currency	The learning or learning credential is still valid, up to date, and performable
3. Quality	The learning or learning credential reached the acceptable level
4. Relevance	The learning or learning credential is applicable to the area claimed
5. Trustworthiness	The learning or learning credential is worthy of confidence and is capable of being depended on
6. Transferability	The learning or learning credential can be applied outside the specific context in which it was learned
Source: The University of South Australia, 2000; The Conference Board of Canada, 2000.	

The essential feature of placing a value on prior learning and learning credentials is that the learning itself, in the form of knowledge and skills which people already possess, becomes recognized and transferable. A learner who can demonstrate the skills and knowledge claimed, by applying the learning inside or outside of the specific context in which it was learned, and who can show that it is valid, up-to-date, and meets acceptable levels of quality should feel confident in receiving proper recognition. For most, adequate recognition must include a credential and accreditation to ensure its transferability.

Three Groups of Learning Stakeholders

Three key groups of stakeholders have a vested interest in recognizing learning and learning credentials:

- Suppliers of Learning (educators and trainers)
- Users of Learning (individual learners, including students and employees)
- Consumers of Learning (employers and the marketplace)

Although these three groups share similar interests in learning and the advancement of knowledge and skills, each has its own mandate and desired learning outcomes. Suppliers of learning have mandates to advance, preserve and disseminate knowledge and understanding, while preserving their expertise and standing in the academic world and attracting learners to their institutions and learning environments. Individual learners have a personal mandate to use learning to develop their capabilities to the fullest throughout life for personal economic advantage that yields individual prosperity, self-sufficiency, self-fulfillment, and to contribute to society. Each employer, and the marketplace as a whole, attempts to use the learning capacity of individuals to gain economic advantage by

¹⁴ University of South Australia, "Guidelines for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning". <http://www.unisa.edu.au/adminfo/codes/rior.htm>, March, 2000.

applying knowledge and understanding to create more valuable products and services that increase the productivity and profitability of their organizations. The differences between these overlapping mandates can lead to the non-recognition of learning and learning credentials.

Group 1: Suppliers of Learning

Suppliers want to ensure that learning gained in their courses and programs is of high quality and leads to a reputable credential that employers, the community, and other learning suppliers all accept. To achieve this, suppliers of learning place great value on providing learners with sound teaching and learning opportunities. By comparison, educators are uncertain about the quality of learning outcomes gained in informal learning environments, and so find it difficult to determine the appropriate credit for prior learning experiences. Better evaluation mechanisms to identify learning outcomes from prior learning experiences would help educators, who tend to be cautious in awarding credit towards their credentials, which they instinctively wish to protect.¹⁵

Group 2: Users of Learning

The *differences* between stakeholders' learning mandates can lead to the non-recognition of learning.

Individuals naturally seek high quality instruction and place a high value on their own learning and learning experiences. They also place high importance on having their previous learning experiences recognized. This is wise because acquiring knowledge that is formally credentialled closely correlates with personal and professional development, and career success. More recognized learning translates into more advanced skills and knowledge, which improves prospects for employment, on-the-job responsibility, promotion and transfer.

In order for opportunities to be realized, learning must first be recognized.

Labour force participation rates, 1976 – 1994, indicate that completing an education program is a key to securing employment. Thus, university graduates enjoyed a steady participation rate of about 85% throughout this period. In general, individuals with

higher education levels consistently had lower unemployment rates than people with lower education levels. As jobs become more highly skilled, qualifications are becoming even more important in finding work and staying employed. This suggests that there will be significant economic benefits if more prior learning is appropriately evaluated and

¹⁵ Some learning suppliers tell learners “if you haven’t learned it from us, we can’t certify it.” In 1997, Tom Norton, President of the Association of Canadian Community Colleges, observed that, for some learners, suppliers’ control of the credential assessment and granting process creates a kind of institutional ‘tyranny.’ (see “The Learning Highway Runs Through Here,” in *College Canada Newsmagazine*, 1996-1997, Vol.2, Issue 4, p. 3). Some learning suppliers also hesitate to recognize previously uncredentialled learning because of the potential loss of student registrations. (See Kathryn Barker and Charles Bélanger, *The Status of PLA/PLAR in Professional Programs in Ontario Universities*, May 1999, p. 82. They site PLA/PLAR as being perceived by universities as a means to attract students. p. 52).

credentialled or credited towards formal educational programs because it will help people obtain secure employment, and improve the long-term prosperity of the nation.¹⁶

Skills translate into higher earnings. A recent Conference Board of Canada study on the economic benefits of improving basic skills in the workplace identified a strong association between literacy skills and employment earnings. Employees with higher literacy skills earn more than those with lower literacy skills. For example, over an employee's working lifetime, a male with high document literacy skills can expect to earn \$1.74 million in pre-tax income, while a male with low literacy skills can expect to earn only \$1.16 million. Overall, the average annual income for high literacy individuals is about double that of individuals with low literacy skills.¹⁷ The higher income is due to increased employment earnings and the greater probability of being employed, of finding full-time work and of receiving training on-the-job.

In another study of human capital formation, Riddell and Sweetman note that "as education increases, unemployment decreases, and wages increase for both sexes and for all age groups." They also point out that college graduates earn 10-20 per cent and university bachelor graduates earn 35-60 per cent more per hour than high school graduates.¹⁸ However, for opportunities to be realized, learning must first be recognized. Learners are thus naturally strongly in favour of getting all of their learning recognized and learning credentials accepted. They see that non-recognition results in personal underemployment and underdevelopment.

Group 3: Consumers of Learning

Employers tend to value the quality of their employees' learning without regard to where or how the learning takes place. They do not view learning delivery or development as the exclusive responsibility or right of any one institution or system. They tend to recognize and credit any learning that provides employees with the skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to function in their workplace and that they deem to be authentic, current, high quality, relevant, and trustworthy.¹⁹ In many occupations the level of trust that employers and society place on occupation-specific learning is legally recognized through professional papers, documents and licenses.²⁰ And although this formal recognition system is needed to protect the public interest and ensure the trustworthiness of people in critical occupations, it can sometimes cause barriers in recognizing bona fide learning and learning credentials.

¹⁶ *Performance and Potential 1997*. (Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 1997), p. 63.

¹⁷ Michael Bloom, Marie Burrows, Brenda Lafleur and Robert Squires, *The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy Skills in the Workplace*. (Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 1997). pp. 10-15.

¹⁸ W. Craig Riddell & Arthur Sweetman, *Human Capital Formation in a Period of Rapid Change*. UBC Department of Economics, Discussion Papers – 2000. <http://www.arts.ubc.ca/econ/discpapers/DP0006.pdf>. Employment growth in Canada, 1990-95, was by university graduates (28%) and college graduates (20%) while employment for HS graduates and dropouts declined. Over 70% of university, college and trades graduates find their education closely relates to their first job, compared with only 20% of high school graduates.

¹⁹ The disparity between the assessment and credentialing mechanisms of professional and trade bodies in Canada affects how and what learning and learning credentials are recognized in the marketplace.

²⁰ For example, to be an engineer, pilot, lawyer or medical doctor requires a valid license or certification papers.

Benefits of Recognizing Learning

The benefits for suppliers, users and consumers of learning in having more learning formally recognized and credentialled are summarized in Table 2, below.

Significantly, *all* three stakeholder groups gain several benefits from increasing learning recognition. The benefits obtained are interrelated and complement one another. This is natural because improved development and employment of employee-learners based on more comprehensive recognition of their learning positively impacts organizational performance, which depends so much on the performance of employees. This, in turn, creates additional demand from both employees and employers for more accreditation. More accreditation encourages more individual decisions to participate in education that, in turn, stimulates the growth and development of the country's public education and training systems.

Table 2 Benefits of Recognizing Learning for Three Stakeholder Groups

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Learning Suppliers (educators)	Users of Learning (employee-learners)	Consumers of Learning (employers)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Greater number of learners in learning programs <i>in aggregate</i> 2. Meet societal needs for holistic learning and personal development 3. Provide more lifelong learning opportunities 4. Enhanced recognition of learning environments 5. Make better use of resources 6. Provide access to a wider range of potential learners 7. Enable institutional growth 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased access to employment opportunities and promotion 2. Higher income 3. Enhanced personal development 4. Greater lifelong learning opportunities 5. Reduced duplication of education and training 6. Enhanced quality of life 7. Increased job mobility, access to employment, and enhanced career development 8. Learners who are members of disadvantaged groups gain more equal access to learning 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maximize the productivity and innovation capacity of workforce 2. Increased profitability 3. Fuller employment of human capital 4. Fuller development of employees as resources for organization 5. Reduced training & development costs 6. A reliable way to assess and match skills to workplace needs 7. A framework for setting career goals and training needs of employees
Source: The Conference Board of Canada, 2000.		

Costs of Not Recognizing Learning

The total cost of non-recognition depends on the size of the *learning recognition gap* between the amount of learning that *is* recognized and the amount that *could be* with improved systems and processes.

On the flip side of economic benefits, there can be tangible economic costs when learning is not recognized. These costs result when people are underemployed in the workplace, and underdeveloped due to lack of training and education, because part of their learning is not recognized and utilized by their employers. The total cost of non-recognition depends on the size of the *learning recognition gap* between the amount of learning that *is* recognized and the amount that

could be with improved systems and processes.

The learning recognition gap can take many forms. Sometimes, individuals who seek formal learning credentials find that they cannot get their uncredentialed prior learning adequately recognized. As a result, they have to pay the costs in money and time to repeat learning and undergo additional testing in a formal setting. The costs of this unnecessary duplication of learning tend to discourage people from ‘upgrading’. This duplication also creates unnecessary costs for employers who support employee learning through partial or entire subsidy of tuition and paid time off for participation in courses.²¹ The same costs apply for the same reasons when individuals hold foreign learning credentials which are not recognized within Canada and are expected to go through similar recognition processes to obtain whole or partial recognition for them.

Lack of recognition of learning sometimes presents obstacles to career advancement, causing people to do lower value work than which they are capable.²² Without formal

Without formal learning recognition people may earn less, may be more likely to lose their jobs, and may be less likely to gain promotion.

recognition from the governing educational, professional and trades regulatory institutions, they lack mobility to move across jurisdictions and borders to find work in their chosen profession or trade. As a result, they may earn less, may be more likely to lose their jobs, and may be less likely to gain promotion.

Table 3, below, lists factors that contribute to the non-recognition of learning and learning credentials in Canada which, in turn, leads to the underemployment and underdevelopment of people in our workplaces.

²¹ Michael Bloom and Brenda Lafleur, *Turning Skills into Profit: The Economic Benefits of Workplace Education Programs* (New York: The Conference Board Inc., 1999).

²² This is significant in an era of brain drain when NAFTA and the opening of North American borders sometimes makes it easier for a Canadian to find good employment in another country rather than at home. This leads to lower levels of income for these people and lower levels of productivity for their organization and the economy as a whole.

Table 3**Barriers to Recognizing Learning: Contributing Factors**

1. Regulatory agencies may not recognize or recognize fully:
 - Foreign educational credentials or prior learning of new Canadians.
2. Provincially-based professional licensing and standards bodies may not recognize or recognize fully:
 - Competency gained in other provinces;
 - Competency of new Canadians;
 - Licenses or standards of other non-government organizations.
3. National and sectoral professional licensing and standards bodies may not recognize or recognize fully:
 - Competency gained in other provinces;
 - Competency of new Canadians;
 - License or standards of other non-governmental organizations
4. Learning institutions may not recognize or recognize fully:
 - Education credentials from other institutions or jurisdictions in Canada
 - Foreign education credentials
 - Prior learning from workplaces
 - “Real-life” experience
 - “Alternative” education
 - Language and communications learning
5. Employers may not recognize or recognize fully:
 - Foreign education, professional and trades credentials
 - Prior learning from other workplaces
 - “Real-life” experience
 - “Alternative” education – e.g. store-front and other non-traditional schools and learning systems
6. Firm-specific training delivered by firms within Canada and elsewhere may not be recognized or recognized fully by:
 - Other firms
 - Professional licensing and standards bodies
 - Colleges and universities

Source: The Conference Board of Canada, 2000.

Barriers to Recognizing Learning

Several barriers to recognizing learning affect the success of current learning recognition processes in Canada in assessing and valuing knowledge and skills that people gain through formal education, training and work and life experiences.

Lack of Universal, Comparable Standards

The complexity of the systems of standards for regulating learning and employment across Canada make recognizing learning more challenging. Chartered educational institutions award diplomas and degrees based on a system of prerequisite formal educational credits and many trades and professions also regulate standards based on formal educational qualifications. Problems lie in the lack of explicit comparability and universality of the systems of standards that they employ.

While legitimate factors such as distinct policies and funding mechanisms will continue to distinguish provincial education systems from one another, new ways to connect

A learning recognition gap can lead to the underdevelopment and underemployment of people, and impair productivity and innovation in the Canadian economy.

provincial education standards may need to be considered. Today, the lack of universality of standards in Canada, and internationally, can lead to inconsistency in establishing the value of some types of learning and learning credentials. In consequence, it is sometimes difficult to get valuable learning recognized

and credentials transferred. The result may be a *learning recognition gap* in Canada, which leads to the underdevelopment and underemployment of people, and impairs productivity and innovation in the Canadian economy.²³

Within chartered educational institutions and professional associations in Canada, there have also been challenges in ensuring better recognition for the learning obtained in diploma and degree programs. This can increase the costs of obtaining a credential and admittance into certain occupations.

Coupled with this is the challenge of determining the value of foreign credentials since they too lack universal standards based upon common agreement between institutions and governments and employers about the value of the learning and the reliability of the institutions and credentials in declaring the learning achievements of individuals.

Finally, experiential learning, too, lacks universal standards based upon common agreement about the value of each type of prior learning and the mechanisms for assessing and credentialing the learning. Since learning is more likely to be duplicated if prior learning is not properly assessed, lack of these standards for prior learning assessment and

²³ Productivity and innovation depend partly on the skills and abilities of the workforce. Education levels and on-the-job training affect people's ability to make optimal use of equipment and to take on new activities quickly and efficiently. A commitment by users, suppliers and consumers of learning to improve learning recognition processes while investing in new forums for learning, like workplace education programs, is an essential factor in maintaining Canada's global competitiveness. *Performance & Potential 1999*: (Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada, 1999).

recognition (PLAR) can significantly increase workplace training costs and limit people's development. This is of particular concern to individuals who may not possess formal domestic educational credentials but who may, nonetheless, be knowledgeable and skillful due to experiential learning, as well as to the employers for whom they work.

Incompatibility

Incompatibility of learning recognition systems makes it more difficult to obtain full recognition of valuable learning and learning credentials and makes transferability more difficult. Sometimes, the proper recognition, transferability and mobility of learning and learning credentials do not take place because our highly decentralized systems for awarding credentials find it difficult to agree on common definitions of learning and use evaluation systems that have no inter-connections.

Limited Interprovincial Portability of Credentials

As education is a provincial responsibility, there are challenges in improving the interprovincial portability of credentials between Canadian institutions of higher learning. In the world of work, some 50 professional and technical occupations are governed through self-regulating colleges on a provincial basis. In addition, 20 trades are subject to a system of mandatory provincial licensing. About a fifth of the Canadian workforce is employed in these regulated occupations. This provincially-based system of credentialling and licensing may present jurisdictional barriers to mobility and the efficient employment of people throughout Canada.

Lack of Universal Workplace Training Credentials

Businesses and government as employers spend millions on training, some of which leads to employer-granted credentials that are not recognized by other employers. This problem relates to a well-known market failure in training where firms have incentives to invest in training that is firm-specific, which therefore has a lower probability of being transferred to potential rivals. Nonetheless, virtually all firm-based training has some application to other workplaces.

Decentralization

The lack of formal recognition of learning and credentials sometimes arises because the systems for credentialing are too decentralized and there are inadequate mechanisms for creating new, widely accepted, learning credentials. Without an umbrella national recognition board or agency in Canada, the responsibility for recognizing learning and credentials has been divided among a number of disparate organizations, institutions, governing bodies and regulatory bodies primarily interested in their own specific trades, skills, knowledge areas, business sectors, and jurisdictions.²⁴ The fact that non-recognition of learning and credentials is an issue that spreads over many jurisdictions, and encompasses

²⁴ Primarily chartered institutions of higher learning and provincially regulated professional bodies.

layers of government, learning institutions, learners, employers, and professional licensing and standards bodies makes it more difficult to bring about large scale improvements.

Value Differences

Sometimes, organizations and individuals resist transfers between institutions and across jurisdictions because they place different value on the same kind of learning and cannot agree on a common value. This can be especially problematic for individuals seeking to transfer credits or prior learning credentials to gain partial credit towards an educational, professional or trades qualification.

Learning is Perceived as a Public Education Phenomenon

In Canada, learning is usually seen as being linked to the public education system and its member institutions. However, the idea that learning can also come from the workplace, home study or life experience is gaining attention. A *bridge* between learning and the education system has been formed through the implementation of prior learning assessment systems and other activities, where non-institutional learning is captured within an educational environment²⁵

Solutions that Improve Recognizing Learning

Many solutions for learning recognition issues have been suggested to help improve how well we recognize learning and learning credentials in Canada. The main ideas are summarized below.

Create Common Values

Find common ground among learning organizations, employers and individuals in determining the value of previous learning. Start by agreeing on the utility of finding common values, then identify significant differences in valuation and explore the reasons for the differences.

Expand Authority

Give expanded authority to education and training systems to credential learning in order to overcome current limitations in scope that are impeding effectiveness. Continue to promote systems and mechanisms which create new, widely-accepted credentials for learning.

Enhance and Strengthen Standards

Enhance standards for recognizing international learning and learning credentials and for recognizing qualifications in regulated and non-regulated occupations in order to ensure accuracy, consistency and fairness of the learning recognition that takes place. Strengthen

²⁵ See Tom Norton. "The Learning Highway Runs Through Here," in *College Canada Newsmagazine*, 1996-1997 (The Association of Canadian Community Colleges), Vol.2, Issue 4, p. 3.

standards and enforcement mechanisms that recognize non-traditional forms of learning such as workplace experience and home study.

Create National Institutions

Create national institutions and networks of institutions across Canada to recognize, credential and accredit a wide range of formal and informal learning gained within Canada. Initiatives such as the Canadian Learning Banks's Credit Review Service and the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC) are two such initiatives already underway. Parallel national institutions need to be operating to do the same for the full range of international credentials.

Increase Recognition of Foreign Credentials and Learning

Increase the scale of recognition of foreign, international learning and learning credentials.²⁶ Getting foreign or international credentials, qualifications and learning recognized in Canada currently depends on a number of factors including the individual's province of residence, intentions for work or pursuit of educational studies. With educational studies, the assessment of credentials for admission to courses and programs is at the discretion of each institution. For work, recognition of previous learning and credentials further depends on whether the occupation is regulated, if the occupation is a trade or a Red Seal trade, and on province or territory of residence.

Build Stronger Institutional Linkages

Build stronger linkages between universities, colleges and other education and learning institutions that include formalized agreements on transfer credits between institutions. The starting point may be to examine the state of Canada's systems for awarding credentials that include chartered institutions of higher learning and regulatory bodies under provincial jurisdiction.

Commit More Resources

Commit more people and financing to administer and evaluate different types of learning and learning credentials. Substantial increases in resources are needed to significantly expand the scope of current recognition systems to encompass the full range of formal and informal learning that individuals experience.

Create Consumer Demand

Create greater consumer demand for systematic, seamless, easy to access learning recognition processes and institutions. Greater public awareness of the value to them as individuals of investing more resources into improving credentialling, PLAR and

²⁶ See: Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials', "*Fact Sheet No.2: Assessment and recognition of credentials for the purpose of employment in Canada*". <http://www.cicic.ca/factsheets/factsheet2en.stm>, and *Report on Federal, Provincial and Territorial Activities Related to the Assessment of Credentials, 1995-1996*. www.cicic.ca/pubs/assessen.htm. (See Appendix 1 for details).

accreditation processes will help stimulate governments to take action, in unison, to address the learning recognition barriers.

Transferability and Mobility of Learning

Transferability and mobility of learning can affect all learning stakeholders, but especially the learners themselves. Transferability generally refers to the acceptance of credits between two or more educational institutions or training organizations, and mobility normally refers to the recognition or acceptance of credentials by different jurisdictions, such as provinces, territories or other countries.

Barriers to the transferability and mobility of learning tend to restrict the movement of learners by reducing the number of institutions and employers who are likely to accept their learning - or even to have institutional processes to consider the value of their learning.

According to Paul Byrne, Chair, Association of Canadian Community Colleges' Transferability and Mobility Task Group, the primary purpose of improving transfer and mobility is to respond to the needs of learners by facilitating the portability of their learning. This will enable them to move more readily from one learning institution to another, from employer to employer, across provincial or national boundaries, and from one professional licensing body's jurisdiction to another's.²⁷

Transferability

Individuals faced with re-learning because their learning credentials from other jurisdictions or countries are not accepted for transfer, may decide to give up if they cannot recover their education or training costs. This may cause significant productivity loss for Canada.

Individuals faced with re-learning for credit, or repeating or redoing the learning they already have because their learning credentials or work experiences from other jurisdictions or countries are not accepted for transfer, may decide to give up if they cannot recover their education or training costs and risk losing income at the same time. Collectively, the decisions of many individuals to forgo this 're-learning' may cause significant productivity loss for Canada due to

lost or delayed opportunity to fully employ their knowledge and skills (human capital).

Leaving Canada for work abroad is not an automatic option for individuals seeking to avoid the costs of re-learning in this country. For graduates of Canadian learning institutions to gain full global mobility, they need to enhance the recognition of their credits, certificates and diplomas in a world where the "degree is the coin of the realm". In Europe, for example, fifteen member states of the European Union and several Nordic and eastern Europe countries are participating in a European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) which enables students to transfer to any member country institution and receive full credit for

²⁷ Paul J. Byrne, "Transferability and Mobility—An Overview". College Canada – Newsmagazine. (Ottawa: Association of Canadian Community Colleges, Vol. 4, Issue 1, 1998/1999). p. 7.

whole or partial credentials they have already gained. ECTS is designed to encourage the development of language, cultural and business skills.

Employers faced with upgrading their employees' skills to compete better in rapidly changing workplaces and markets stand to gain when the employees' previous learning experiences are recognized. When more recognition is made possible by improved credential transferability processes, it allows them to make more accurate choices in their hiring processes because they are better able to identify recruits with the full range of knowledge and skills that they seek. Recognition allows them to cut spending on unneeded training and instead to focus their investment on building on the full range of their employees' existing knowledge and skills. Both of these advantages may be critical to a company's ability to remain competitive and productive.

It should be emphasized that some transfer of credits between institutions and organizations already takes place in Canada, creating interesting opportunities and challenges for learners and employers.²⁸

Mobility

The mobility, or acceptance, of credentials across provincial, territorial and international boundaries involves a complex combination of education and training organizations, licensing and regulatory bodies, and professional associations.

The issue of mobility is linked to the individual's ability to relocate to other parts of Canada or internationally in order to gain work or to further their studies. Nearly eight per cent of undergraduate students in Canada study out of province every year.²⁹ Human Resources Development Canada estimates that over 500,000 members of the 15-million strong Canadian workforce relocate to a new province or territory every year for employment. Perhaps one-fifth of them, or 100,000 individuals, are among the three million Canadians working in regulated occupations subject to challenges pertaining to the "provincial" recognition of their qualifications. The scale of movement is significant given that there is no comprehensive standardized system of recognition that supports easy mobility among Canada's learning institutions, employers and workplaces.

²⁸ As noted in Byrne, pp. 7-8.

²⁹ ACCC, April 1999.

Barriers to Transferability and Mobility of Learning

There are several major barriers and obstacles affecting the transferability and mobility of learning and learning credentials between and among different learning institutions and organizations.³⁰

No Centralized Regulatory Structure

The fact that there is more than one model of transfer available in Canada and no overreaching central transfer organization or regulatory body has led to a disconnect between the various suppliers, users and consumers of learning. The lack of centralized regulation makes it more difficult for the stakeholders to develop widely accepted transfer standards and practices. Recent agreements among universities and colleges are positive steps towards addressing this barrier.

Miscommunication and Lack of Coordination

Miscommunication and lack of coordination in conducting transfer agreements among institutions creates inefficiencies and ineffectiveness. Problems include changes being made to a receiving program's regulations without sufficient advance notice to institutions sending transfers, larger losses of credits on transfer than indicated in published information, and significant drops in learners' GPAs caused by a receiving institution recalculating a student's average to fit their own scale. In 1997, the British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfers conducted a survey of college and university students in British Columbia and found that 9% of respondents experienced major difficulties with the transfer process (69% experienced no difficulties). This percentage was higher for the colleges (10%) than for the universities (3%).³¹

Incompatibility and Lack of Universal Standards

In Canada, transferability and mobility of learning are made more complex by the multiplicity of provincial, national and international standards.³² The resulting

³⁰ See Byrne, p. 7; British Columbia Council on Admissions and Transfer (BCCAT). *Survey of Advising and Admissions Personnel on Administrative Systems Related to Transfer – Results*. Summer 1997.

<http://www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/advisors.pdf>; and The Office of Institutional Analysis, *BC College Transfer Credit Evaluation: An Analysis of Students Entering the University of Victoria*, (University of Victoria, June 1999).

<http://www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/uvicjun99.pdf>. Compared to other provinces, British Columbia's post-secondary system enjoys a high degree of credit transferability and student movement among universities. However, caution should be exercised when comparing transfer rates of learning institutions as a measure of effectiveness because the large variety of transfer rate measures that have been developed have created complexities that must be taken into account when measuring transfer. These different approaches help explain the inconsistent pattern of transfer rates published in the literature. See: Frank Gelin. *Transfer Rates: How to measure and for what purpose?* (BCCAT: November, 1999).

³¹ <http://www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/advisors.pdf>, 1997, pg. 3.

³² For example, the immigration of a professional to Canada usually involves a "churning cost," comprised in part of the additional education (including upgrading, certification and language skills) required to qualify or be licensed for a job in a particular field. Don DeVortez and Samuel Laryea, *Canadian Human Capital Transfers: The United States and Beyond*, Commentary 115 (Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute, October 1998), p. 22.

incompatibility between learning institutions, workplaces, jurisdictions, and various occupations creates significant practical problems in recognizing learning. Types of incompatibility include courses that do not match by name or number of credits; courses that are out of semester sequence between two institutions or between branches of the same institution; and skills that are ignored, not recognized or valued from one institution to another.

Administrative Barriers

Administrative processes unrelated to actual transfer agreements between the learning institutions also act as barriers to transfers. These include such process-related factors as delays in generating transcripts, delays in instructors assigning grades, delays in registering receipt of transcripts, and delays in assigning transfer credit.

Conflicting Interests

Institutions and organizations may have widely diverging interests in relation to recognizing learning that create conflicts of motivation and action which reduce their capacity to recognize learning and learning credentials in a timely fashion on a scale adequate to the needs of individuals and employers.

Lack of Learner Awareness

Learners are unaware, or do not have a good understanding, of the transfer systems available to them and so do not take full advantage of their opportunities to transfer credits and credentials. Greater awareness would increase demand that might stimulate institutions to be more pro-active in improving transferability and mobility.

Solutions that Improve Transferability and Mobility of Learning

There are many strategies for improving the transferability and mobility of learning in Canada, especially *within* individual provinces. The following is not meant to be an exclusive list; it highlights some of the most interesting initiatives now underway across the country. As the issue grows in importance and public and institutional awareness increase, new initiatives are expected to emerge.

College – University Transfers

Several provinces, including Alberta, British Columbia and Québec (cégep system), have formal transfer programs in place which enable the first two years of university to be completed at a college.³³ In most university transfer programs, a college offers a university's curriculum. The advantages to the learner include lower tuition fees, smaller class sizes and the ability to attend locally.

One of the Ontario government's priorities for the post-secondary education sector is to encourage cooperation between colleges and universities. In 1996, for example, the Ontario government created the College-University Consortium Council (CUCC) to promote joint education and training ventures between Ontario's post-secondary institutions. Among the Council's achievements has been the creation of the Ontario College-University Transfer Guide on the Internet. The Guide provides students and institutions with a list of collaborative programs, articulation agreements and credit transfer arrangements between Ontario universities and colleges. The Council has also negotiated an agreement (the Port Hope Accord) between colleges and universities which will allow Ontario students to move more easily between the two sectors.

Transfer Councils

Transfer Councils (e.g., in Alberta, British Columbia and Newfoundland/Labrador) identify and establish opportunities for students to complete work at one institution and then have the credit transferred to another. Functioning as clearinghouses, these councils encourage transfer arrangements among and between post secondary institutions but rarely have the power to mandate transfer.

Block Transfers

As well as having a course-by-course transfer model, British Columbia is also looking at implementing a Block Transfer model for its arts and science programs. Block Transfer, is already used in the B.C. post-secondary system to facilitate the transfer of professional and applied programs. It is a process whereby a block of credits is granted to a student who has successfully completed a certificate, diploma or cluster of courses that is recognized as

³³ For more information on B.C.'s block transfer program go to: <http://www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/blockup.pdf>. In addition, please see the Block Transfer Handbook, (April 2000) at: http://www.bccat.bc.ca/pubs/GDA_BCCAT97.pdf

having an academic wholeness or integrity, and that can be related meaningfully to a degree program.

Consortia

Consortia, such as Contact South, in Ontario, or the Atlantic Community Colleges Consortium develop specific courses that are then recognized for transfer by all members of the consortium group.³⁴ Twenty-eight universities across Canada formed the Canadian University Student Exchange Consortium (CUSEC), and the members of the Regroupement des universités de la francophonie hors Québec have put in place a student exchange program. Within these programs, students are ensured full recognition by their home institution for the credits earned elsewhere.

University – University Transfers

Individual agreements between and among the same type of institutions and organizations also take place. For example, the senates of the universities in Nova Scotia implemented a policy providing for full transferability of first and second year courses within the Nova Scotia university system, and the University of Prince Edward Island has committed to recognize credits earned at any university in Canada.³⁵ However, these individual agreements are not always well publicized nor are they well understood by the learners – or many of the professors.

Transfer Partnerships

There are several examples of transfer partnerships in Canada where recognition of learning and learning credentials is made between various non-education organizations, such as private business and industry, associations and unions. For example, the agreement between the Canadian Steel Trade and Employment Congress and various institutions credits the learning and learning credentials delivered by the Congress.

Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT)

The interprovincial aspect of credential recognition was addressed by the 1994 Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) between the federal and provincial governments, yet implementing the agreement has been slow and is still not complete. While some mechanisms for mobility are in place, such as the Red Seal Program which enables apprentices to move more easily among jurisdictions, there is need for more work in this area.³⁶ Moreover, a system of credential evaluation is in operation in most provinces for assessing educational qualifications for both continuing education and licensing.

³⁴ The Atlantic Community Colleges Consortium is made up of the New Brunswick Community College, New Brunswick Department of Education, College of the North Atlantic, Newfoundland Department of Education, Nova Scotia Community College, Nova Scotia Department of Education, Holland College, and the Prince Edward Island Department of Education.

³⁵ As cited in: <http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/transferability.stm>.

³⁶ ACCC, Vol. 4, Issue 1. p. 8.

Pan-Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credits

There has been some progress in the mutual recognition of education qualifications in Canada. In 1994, the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC), the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) recommended that the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada make it a priority to remove barriers to post-secondary student mobility among provinces and territories, including barriers to transferring university credits. The ministers agreed in the *Pan-Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credits*³⁷ to have Canadian degree-granting institutions recognize and accept transfer credits for the first two-years of undergraduate study in 1995. By 1997, all but seven Canadian universities had signed the Protocol.

Pan-Canadian Mobility and Transferability Protocol

In 1997, Association of Canadian Community College members unanimously identified mobility and transferability as a priority. A task group recommended the development of a *Pan-Canadian Mobility and Transferability Protocol*. The protocol for credit transfer among colleges would facilitate for individuals and enterprises increased access to colleges, mobility between colleges, and mobility between college and the labour market. Signatories to this protocol also agreed to maximize the recognition and transfer of learning acquired through formal education, workplace training and work and life experience.³⁸ By October, 2000, 77 colleges across Canada had signed the protocol.

Additionally, some articulation agreements are in place between colleges and universities to recognize each other's credentials. However, these agreements are not keeping pace with the rising flow of students moving between universities and colleges.

Forum of Labour Market Ministers

The Forum of Labour Market Ministers is looking for ways to eliminate mobility barriers for workers. Lack of portable training is one such barrier.

Finally, the Forum of Labour Market Ministers (FLMM) is looking at ways to eliminate mobility barriers for workers. Lack of portable training is one such barrier. For years workers have pushed for training that is portable, and as governments and business out source this training, they want to ensure

employees receive the same quality of training across the country and that credentials relating to such training are portable.³⁹ The FLMM is considering ways to link licensing with training as a strategy for eliminating training barriers and improving transferability and mobility.

³⁷ For detailed information, go to: Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. *The Pan-Canadian Protocol on the Transferability of University Credits*, <http://www.cmec.ca/postsec/transferability.stm>.

³⁸ For detailed information on the Association of Canadian Community Colleges' *Pan-Canadian Mobility and Transferability Protocol* go to. <http://www.accc.ca/english/advocacy/priorities/mt-protocol.htm>.

³⁹ As noted in: <http://www.accc.ca/english/advocacy/priorities/mt-statement.htm>.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) bridges learning and education by allowing individuals to get recognition for the skills and knowledge they have acquired, and by giving equal value to comparable learning and skills whether these skills come from school, post-secondary education, workplace experiences, community work, on-the-job training, or other life experiences. The PLAR process takes various forms; its outcomes can help achieve the goals of individuals, labour market partners, and society at large.⁴⁰

Table 4 Common Meanings of PLAR

- Receiving proper recognition for learning from workplace experiences or other forms of lifelong learning
- Receiving credit for a certain level of education or vocational training
- Receiving proper recognition for education or training from another country leading to a relevant *skills-related* job in Canada;
- Recognizing that a person has all the skills needed to do a job, but not the required education.

Source: Canadian Labour Force Development Board, 1997; The Conference Board of Canada, 2000

Pundits and enthusiasts of PLAR believe it is an important and valuable process of recognition and assessment for many providers, users and consumers of learning. Among other things, PLAR, according to the CLFDB, is a fair, bias-free process for recognizing and assessing an individual's learning and abilities; a reliable means of assessing and matching skills to workplace needs; and an excellent use of limited resources.

Benefits of PLAR

A 1999 cross-Canada study of PLAR, involving seven colleges, 3,519 PLAR learners and 7,912 learning assessments in over 1,400 courses, found five main benefits:

Table 5 Five Benefits of PLAR

- Adult learners get educationally relevant, college-level prior learning assessed and recognized within post-secondary educational settings
- Strengthens adult learners' confidence in their own capacities to learn and motivates them to pursue further education
- Shortens completion time for education programs, and reduces course loads and costs for part-time adult learners. This particularly benefits part-time students seeking employment-related training and occupational credentials
- Can be used as a marketing tool to attract learners to education requiring training for employment or occupational certification.
- It is an effective tool to market college programs to potential students over age 30⁴¹

⁴⁰ Canadian Labour Force Development Board. *Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition*, #35. January, 1997.

⁴¹ Sandra Aarts et al. 1999. p. ix.

Table 6, below, highlights the key benefits of PLAR for providers, users and suppliers of learning.

Table 6 Who Benefits from PLAR and How?		
Providers of Learning (Education & Training Institutions & Professionals)	Users of Learning (Individual Learners)	Consumers of Learning (Employers)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make better use of limited resources • Provide access to a wider range of potential learners • Assure learners that they can transfer from one place to another with more flexibility • Increase the rate of student retention • Place students more effectively • Collaborate better with employers to develop courses that meet workplace needs • Provide more lifelong learning opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to education and training • Obtain a fair, bias-free process for assessing their learning • Make better use of time and resources—no repeating courses • Gain increased job mobility, access to employment, and enhanced career development • Learners who are members of disadvantaged groups such as new Canadians gain more equal access to learning. • Increase self-knowledge and self-esteem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reliable way to assess and match skills to workplace needs • A framework for setting career goals and training needs of employees • Allows design of in-house training to meet specific needs of workers • Provides access to a more diverse workforce • Offers savings on training costs by reducing needless learning repetition • Opportunity to enhance workplace learning partnerships • Opportunity to enhance productivity • Reduces the risk of hiring workers with questionable credentials.
Source: Canadian Labour Force Development Board, 1996, 1997; Carol Mathews, 1996/1997.		

Provincial Government Initiatives

As early as 1977, many learning institutions in Canada began to implement PLAR projects. In ten years, PLAR projects were piloted and developed in many learning jurisdictions in Ontario, Manitoba and Quebec and elsewhere. Government typically played an indirect role in implementing PLAR initiatives and relied on educational institutions to take the lead since they were best positioned to determine the learning outcomes achieved for courses and programs.

However, in 1984, the Quebec government passed a regulation requiring the province's Colleges of General and Professional Education (Cegeps) to award credit for non-academic learning.⁴² Other governments, noting the importance of PLAR, have undertaken initiatives to directly address barriers in both publicly-funded post-secondary institutions and training systems. In Ontario, the provincial government took a significant role in supporting the introduction of PLAR activity in the college system. In 1993, a PLAR Advisory and Coordinating Group was established to oversee the implementation of PLAR

⁴² Sandra Aarts, B. Blower, R. Burke et. al. *A Slice of the Iceberg: Cross-Canada Study on Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition*. (Human Resources Development Canada, 1999). p. 1.

in the colleges over a three-year period. This group formulated PLAR policy, oversaw a number of pilot projects and recommended to government ongoing funding provisions for PLAR activity. By 1996, all Ontario colleges were required to provide PLAR services to their learners. Funding and policy provisions remain in place today. Between 1993 and 1998, provinces such as British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland had implemented PLAR principles and methods in their post-secondary institutions.⁴³

Education and Employer Initiatives

While many PLAR initiatives are being undertaken by learning institutions, consortiums, associations and employer organizations in Canada, there is room for much more to be done. PLAR has not been widely accepted as an integral part of the business of educational institutions or workplaces. Its development has been constrained by structural and attitudinal limitations of employers and educational institutions.⁴⁴ It has been suggested that PLAR needs to be a stronger, more integral part of the business operations of educational institutions, and a stronger weapon in the arsenal of human resource developers in the workplace. Before this will occur, greater promotion of the benefits of PLAR is probably needed to raise awareness.

Success Stories

PLAR is starting to demonstrate its value as shown by success stories and innovations in several provincial jurisdictions.

British Columbia

Recognizing B.C. adults' prior learning has enabled people to enter colleges and universities and earn credentials in shorter and sometimes less expensive ways.

Recognizing B.C. adults' prior learning has enabled people to enter colleges and universities and earn credentials in shorter and sometimes less expensive ways. And they have been able to use and integrate their previous learning to achieve both personal and professional goals.

British Columbia has integrated assessment and learning in the PLAR process so that both the content and methods of assessment inform the process and complete the learning history of students. British Columbia learners are becoming active partners in the assessment process, and are being asked to generate evidence from multiple sources when they can to get the most out of their participation in the process.

Many institutions in British Columbia are developing descriptions of what learners should be expected to know and do at the end of a course or program. These outcome

⁴³ For example, Douglas College (BC), Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), Nova Scotia Community College, and Cabot College (Nfld.).

⁴⁴ For a historical overview of the implementation and development of PLAR in Canada, see: Sandra Aarts et al. 1999. pp. 1-3.

statements have streamlined the PLAR process, and have enabled learners to develop better learning plans and generate more suitable evidence for the assessment process.

Training and development opportunities for British Columbia faculty have helped them and other subject specialists to build and develop their assessment skills.⁴⁵

Credit Review Service

Another B.C. based initiative is national in scope. A major program of the Open Learning Agency's Canadian Learning Bank is the Credit Review Service. The Credit Review Service reviews workplace-based training programs completed outside of the public post-secondary system, and awards credit for those programs that are found to be comparable to those offered at colleges and universities.⁴⁶ It was developed in response to demand from employers and employees for formal recognition and accreditation of high quality training programs being offered in their organizations. The OLA is seeking partner PSE institutions across Canada to join in the service and accept its credentials.

Ontario

Ontario Universities' Application Centre's interactive STEP (Student Equivalency Program) shows all Ontario university undergraduate courses and highlights the courses that are considered equivalent among these institutions.

Ontario Universities' Application Centre provides an interactive system called STEP. It shows all Ontario university undergraduate courses and highlights courses considered equivalent among these institutions. Such equivalencies can lead to transfer credits and "letter of Permission" opportunities. The system now includes 18 Canadian universities. The only limits to STEP are that

actual credit transfer is subject to the individual transfer regulations of each institution and that it operates only within Ontario.⁴⁷

Alberta

Alberta Society of Engineering Technologists prepared a policy document in 1997 to look at the development of a national technology credit bank and career portfolio that would provide information regarding the technical competency of both Canadian and foreign-trained workers. The purpose of the national credit bank would be to minimize uncertainty

⁴⁵ Susan Simosko, "BC Trends in Prior Learning Assessment: Where Are We Going?" *Learning Quarterly*. Vol. 1, Issue 3. September 1997. p. 7.

⁴⁶ The Open Learning Agency's Credit Review Service also has the capability of awarding credit for program areas not currently offered specific credentials for, and, where needs are identified, to develop or establish new credentials. The Credit Review Service is available to business, industry, labour unions, public and private training providers, professional and trade associations, and government agencies. For more information on the Credit Review Service go to the Canadian Learning Bank Credit Review Service, *Review Standards* report at: <http://www.ola.bc.ca/credit>. See also Canadian Learning Bank Credit Review Service, *Invitation to Post-Secondary Institutions*, (Open Learning Agency, 2000)

⁴⁷ For more information on STEP, go to: <http://step.ouac.on.ca/>

regarding the national standards for applied science and engineering technologists and technicians.⁴⁸ It awaits the act of creation.

Barriers to PLAR

Successful efforts focus primarily on specific jurisdictions, institutions, limited PLAR partnerships, business or professional sectors.⁴⁹ Individual learners, for example, wanting to get recognition for their knowledge and skills in jurisdictions or institutions not associated with a particular consortium, association or partnership are out of luck. One of the biggest challenges facing PLAR is that the contexts in which PLAR is practiced and carried out still depend very much on the participating learning jurisdictions. Recognition awarded through PLAR is not necessarily transferable between or among organizations, institutions, businesses, provinces and territories. And with no national standards the PLAR process is much less effective than it would otherwise be. In 1999, the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation and the Council of Ontario Universities undertook a joint project to determine how and to what extent PLAR was being used in professional programs in Ontario universities. The study found that PLAR does not appear to be widely used across the universities. Even though there is acknowledgement of the merits of PLAR, the study found five significant deterrents to its use:

Table 7 Eight Barriers to PLAR in Universities

- Universities are already straining to meet the increased demand for enrollment; using PLAR requires time, expertise and other resources which are in short supply.
- Current interest in and understanding of PLAR across universities ranges from acceptance as a good pedagogical assessment practice to blunt refusal to implement.
- Most professional programs do not need PLAR to attract students because they are over-subscribed.
- There appears to be limited interest in and willingness to use PLAR specifically or primarily for foreign-trained professionals.
- Lack of rigorous assessment practices make quality assurance difficult and reinforce concerns for academic quality
- Lack of information about processes and benefits
- Lack of a formal university policy in support of prior learning assessment
- Concerns about anticipated costs and amount of time required.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Alberta Society of Engineering Technologists. *Policy for Identifying Acceptable Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Policy Models for the National Technology Career Credit Bank*. Draft Policy Document. November 1997.

⁴⁹ For example, in Quebec, each college or cegep develops their own models for PLAR, as the Quebec Ministry of Education does not impose one particular model. There is little consolidation or harmonization of practices.

⁵⁰ Kathryn Barker and Charles Belanger. *The Status of PLA/PLAR in Professional Programs in Ontario Universities*. (FutureEd and Vista Grande International: May 1999).

Considering the number of individuals PLAR has assisted and the positive economic and social effects on the Canadian economy, it might be expected that a national approach to prior learning assessment and recognition would already be widely supported. In fact, building a wider acceptance of PLAR in Canada remains a challenge.

Most PLA efforts are still based on formal partnerships and agreements between educational institutions, business and professional regulatory bodies. Individual learners in need of recognition for their knowledge and skills in these jurisdictions may find difficulty in receiving prior learning credit if their previous supplier of learning is not formally recognized. All jurisdictions need to expand their efforts if PLAR is to more comprehensively meet these individuals' needs.

Table 8 highlights the likely social and economic benefits to the Canadian economy if PLAR is implemented on a national scale.

Table 8 Benefits of a National Approach to PLAR:

- **Efficient use of resources**
 - Less repetition of learning
 - Increased ability to identify and focus on skills and areas of knowledge
 - Better use of time and resources for individuals and institutions
 - Better matching of available jobs and potential employees
- **Development of a lifelong learning culture**
 - Formal recognition that learning takes place in a variety of settings
 - Encourages individuals to continue learning in new areas
 - More opportunities to bring learning and work together
- **Coordinated and consistent labour force development**
 - Better assessment of education and training from other countries
 - Consistent standards for skills needed in specific occupations
 - Better information for career and employment counseling, apprenticeship and training programs
 - More opportunities to change jobs or find work in all parts of Canada
 - Efficiency in labour market adjustment and development systems
- **Greater social justice**
 - Fair access to education and training opportunities for all citizens and immigrants
 - Bias-free judgement of education and non-formal learning.
- **Reform of education and training systems**
 - Better working relationships between educators and training programs
 - Recognition of credits in all provinces and education/training systems
 - Clear definition of the skills and knowledge outcomes expected from all training and educational programs
 - More flexibility for individual learning goals and styles, and to meet labour

Table 8 Benefits of a National Approach to PLAR:

market needs

Source: Canadian Labour Force Development Board, 1997; The Conference Board of Canada, 2000

Foreign Credentials Assessment and Recognition (FCAR)

With the increasing international mobility of labour from one economy to another, recognition and accreditation of immigrant professionals is a major social policy issue in Canada, as in many other countries.

With the increasing international mobility of labour from one economy to another, recognition and accreditation of immigrant professionals is a major social policy issue in Canada, as in many other countries. Canada is faced with how to make the best use of the people coming here by immigration so that the nation can be more competitive in international markets?⁵¹

Today in Canada, as elsewhere, complex entry procedures to trades and professions are significant obstacles that hinder the free flow of professional services, diminishing our international competitiveness, in the view of many.⁵² This is a major economic issue as well as a social issue. Nearly half of the immigrants being accepted into Canada enter as 'independent' or 'skilled workers', yet many of these workers are experiencing problems in gaining adequate recognition of their learning to enter the professions or trades for which they hold foreign credentials when they actually enter Canada as immigrants⁵³.

Both individuals and employers stand to benefit from clearer and more comprehensive recognition processes. New Canadians wishing to find work or continue their education in Canada would gain by knowing the recognized value in Canada of the education, training, and experience they acquired outside Canada and by finding out how much of their prior learning and experiences will be formally recognized.⁵⁴ In addition, occupational regulatory bodies, employers, community groups and educational institutions in Canada need to be assured that systems of regulation are in place to protect the health and safety of Canadians by ensuring that all immigrants entering the workforce or continuing with studies meet the required standards of practice and competence.

As illustrated in Table 9, below, many of the 1.5 million immigrants to Canada, 1986-1996, had post-secondary credentials. In fact, the proportion of recent immigrants who have completed university is higher than ever. Yet their entry into the Canadian labour market and educational system has not been easy. The non-accreditation of foreign professionals and tradespeople in Canada, particularly those seeking entry into regulated occupations, has been described as a problem rooted in multiple barriers which cut across a wide range of

⁵¹ Fernando Mata, *The Non-Accreditation of Immigrant Professionals in Canada: Societal Dimensions of the Problem*. (Department of Canadian Heritage, September 1999). http://www.pch.gc.ca/multi/Societeal/content_e.htm.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Brouwer, Andrew, *Immigrants Need Not Apply*. (Ottawa, The Caledon Institute of Social Policy: 1999)

⁵⁴ By far, the largest single group of immigrants in Canada today is the 'independent' or 'skilled worker' class as opposed to the 'family' class or the 'business' or 'investor' class of immigrants. Of the 174,100 immigrants accepted as permanent residents in Canada in 1998, nearly half, 81,146, were in the 'skilled worker' class. (See Citizenship and Immigration Canada. *Facts and Figures 1998: Immigration Overview*. (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada). 1999 as cited in Andrew Brouwer, *Immigrants Need Not Apply*, The Maytree Foundation. http://www.maytree.com/publications_APT-1.html)

institutional layers.⁵⁵ For example, Citizenship and Immigration Canada reports that from 1991 -1994, 10,279 immigrants arrived in Canada listing civil, mechanical, chemical or electrical engineering as their intended occupation, yet only 5,770 (56%) of these immigrants were practicing these professions in Canada.⁵⁶

Barriers to Full Recognition of Immigrants' Learning

There are many barriers to immigrants receiving full recognition for their learning and learning credentials. Some of these relate to the challenges of adapting to a new country. Many immigrants face an initial adjustment period as they establish contacts in Canada, learn one of the official languages, and adapt to a new culture.

Beyond this, they also face the difficulty of getting their education and professional credentials recognized by Canadian employers and professional organizations.⁵⁷ For immigrants, seeking accreditation of their professional degrees in Canada often means dealing with no fewer than four major institutional stakeholders: post-secondary education institutions, provincial governments, professional self-regulating bodies, and employers. Each of these stakeholders has the authority to decide some of the inputs and outcomes of the accreditation process.⁵⁸

Another challenge faced by new immigrants occurs when accreditation assessments are made on the basis of 'imperfect' information regarding the international market value of their professional credentials – what economists have called the “statistical” discrimination of professional credentials. This lack of systematic information on international degrees has led to the proliferation of numerous, sometimes subjective, methods of evaluation used by professional review panels.⁵⁹

Costs to Canada

The non-accreditation of immigrant professionals has cost Canada. Although the exact annual revenue loss derived from labour market inefficiency due to the non-utilization or under-utilization of foreign-trained people is not currently available, it is estimated to be hundreds of millions of dollars. The costs include foregone income, taxes lost and income support given to unemployed or underemployed professionals.⁶⁰ The Canadian Labour

⁵⁵ Mata, 1999.

⁵⁶ Brouwer, *Immigrants Need Not Apply*. http://www.maytree.com/publications_APT-1.html. p. 2

⁵⁷ Jane Badets. *Report of the Expert Panel on Skills: Background Papers—Immigration and Educational Levels in Canada*. (Statistics Canada, 1999). pp. 1-4.

⁵⁸ Mata, 1999. http://www.pch.gc.ca/multi/Societal/picture_e.htm. Provincial governments legislate and fund post-secondary institutions and establish close linkages with occupational and professional associations. *Post-secondary educational institutions* design and deliver programming services in order to grant formal certificates of academic achievement. *Professional or licensing bodies* have the power to certify/license persons as competent to practice a profession. *Employers* play the primary role of providing the accreditation applicant with Canadian work experience.

⁵⁹ Ibid, as cited in McDade, 1998, *Barriers to Recognition of the Credentials of Immigrants in Canada, Studies in Social Policy*. (Ottawa: Institute for Research in Public Policy). p. viii.

⁶⁰ Ibid. In Australia, for instance, the number of immigrants who failed to gain recognition and never returned to their pre-immigration occupations, in 1990, was estimated to be close to 200,000 people. Losses to the Australian national economy due to the non-recognition of foreign degrees ranged between US \$100 and \$350 million. As cited in: Stasiulis,

Force Development Board, in 1999, reported that the costs to Canada of raising and educating the immigrants who arrived between 1992 and 1997 was more than a billion dollars.⁶¹

According to a Price Waterhouse report commissioned by the Ontario government, failure to recognize foreign academic credentials, let alone foreign work experience, results in losses to the economy due to:

- increased costs to the welfare system and social services;
- losses to employers who are unable to find employees with the skills required;
- costs associated with unnecessary retraining of foreign-trained individuals;
- the loss of potential revenue from foreign-trained individuals who are unable to work and contribute to the tax base and other parts of the economy⁶².

The magnitude of the immigrant accreditation problem has compelled most industrialized countries to legislate new standards for occupational regulation and to review policy guidelines on certification, licensing processes and professional training programs. European countries, Australia and the United States, for example, are creating policies to deal with the issue. Their policies for international accreditation are prompting new bilateral and multilateral national agreements, providing rules for the international recognition of diplomas, and establishing information networks on the international standards of trade and professional certification.⁶³

Canadian Initiatives to Recognize Immigrants' Learning

The influx of 1.5 million immigrants into Canada in only ten years between 1986-1996, and the challenges they faced, prompted the Canadian Government and provincial governments to instigate programs and initiatives to address some of the issues limiting the recognition of immigrants' learning and credentials.

Table 9 Recent Immigration Rates to Canada—Immigration & Education Levels (Aged 15+)

Highest Level of Schooling	Immigrated 1986-1991	%	Immigrated 1991-1996	%
Total Population 15+	651,530	100%	845,705	100%
University Completed	137,165	21.1%	213,030	25.2%
Some Post-secondary	79,400	12.2%	96,175	11.4%
Completed Non-University	123,295	18.9%	152,405	18.0%

Multiculturalism and the Economic Agenda in Australia: Adult E.S.L., Overseas Recognition and Anti-Racist Strategies. (Ottawa: Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada), 1990.

⁶¹ As cited in Brouwer, p.3.

⁶² Price Waterhouse Report, p. 3.

⁶³ The Australian system tends to be relatively centralized through a National Office of Skills Recognition, whereas those in the European countries tend to give more autonomy to professional bodies in their licensing decisions, as cited in Jasmin and Boivin, *International Recognition of Qualifications in the European Community: Overview of Current Situation.* (Ottawa: Department of the Secretary of State), 1992.

Table 9 Recent Immigration Rates to Canada—Immigration & Education Levels (Aged 15+)

Secondary School Graduate	96,395	14.8%	121,950	14.4%
Source: Statistics Canada, 2000.				

Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC)

To help immigrants gain recognition, Canada established the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC), in 1991, to improve the transfer of credentials between Canada and other countries. CICIC was established after Canada ratified the 1979 UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees concerning Higher Education in the states belonging to the European Region. The 1979 UNESCO Convention promotes international mobility by facilitating the recognition of foreign degrees and diplomas, advocating wider recognition of educational and professional qualifications, and improving access for other countries to information of an official nature about Canadian systems of higher education.⁶⁴

In its national coordinating role, CICIC collects, organizes, and distributes information, and acts as a national clearing house and referral service to support the recognition and portability of Canadian and international educational and occupational qualifications. It links assessment services, professional regulatory bodies, institutions of higher education, individuals and organizations with the purpose of enhancing fair, consistent, and transparent practices in the assessment and recognition of qualifications.

A recent CICIC study recognized that guiding principles for good practices in the assessment of foreign credentials include:⁶⁵

- the need to promote fair, credible, and standardized methods in the assessment of foreign credentials;
- the need to promote consistency among the jurisdictions in the assessment of foreign credentials;
- the importance of the portability of educational evaluations from one jurisdiction to another;
- the importance of articulating a conceptual framework for the assessment of foreign credentials to promote consistency;
- the advantages of working collaboratively to address issues related to the assessment of foreign credentials.

⁶⁴ A new joint convention was adopted in April 1997 by the countries of the Council of Europe and the UNESCO Europe Region. The new convention, which replaced the 1979 convention, does not differ significantly in substance and objectives. However, it does give greater detail on the responsibilities of ratifying states with respect to the principles and mechanisms for recognition of qualifications and the collection and dissemination of information on higher education. Canada supports the principles of this new joint convention and intends to become legally bound by it, however it has yet to ratify the 1997 convention. From: Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, <http://www.cicic.ca/infokit/mandate-en.stm> and <http://www.cicic.ca/factsheets/factsheet3eng.stm>.

⁶⁵ CICIC. *General Guiding Principles for Good Practice in the Assessment of Foreign Credentials*. <http://www.cicic.ca/pubs/prncpen.stm>.

Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC)

Another national initiative to ensure fairer and more comprehensive recognition and accreditation of foreign and domestic learning and learning credentials is the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC). In April, 1998 ACESC's Provincial Assessment Committee (PAC) developed a working paper on *General Guiding Principles for Good Practices in the Assessment of Foreign Credentials*.⁶⁶ The guiding principles found in the working paper are based on the tenets for the need to promote:

- fair, credible, and standardized methods in the assessment of foreign credentials;
- consistency among the jurisdictions in the assessment of foreign credentials;
- the importance of the portability of educational evaluations from one jurisdiction to another;
- the importance of articulating a conceptual framework for the assessment of foreign credentials to promote consistency, and;
- the advantages of working collaboratively to address issues related to the assessment of foreign credentials.⁶⁷

Provincially-Based International Evaluation Services

To help new immigrants get their work and education experiences recognized there are four provincially-mandated international credential evaluation service offices in Canada.

Procedures for evaluating and recognizing foreign qualifications depend on whether a person wants to enter an occupation or pursue further studies; whether the chosen occupation is regulated or non-regulated; and in which province or territory the occupation or studies is being pursued. To help new immigrants get their work and education experiences

recognized there are four provincially-mandated international credential evaluation service offices in Canada: the International Credential Evaluation Service (ICES) in British Columbia, the International Qualifications Assessment Service (IQAS) in Alberta, and Service des équivalences d'études in Quebec.⁶⁸ Together, ICES, IQAS and the Service des équivalences d'études and the CICIC founded the Alliance of Credential Evaluation Services of Canada (ACESC). The Alliance provides employers, professional regulatory bodies and educational institutions with the assistance they require and the quality assurance they demand in

⁶⁶ Representatives from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture, and Recreation and the Manitoba Ministry of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship joined the group and participated in the discussions as observers. As cited in: *General Guiding Principles for Good Practice in the Assessment of Foreign Credentials – Working Paper*. Provincial Assessment Committee – Canada, April 1998. p.1.

⁶⁷ Ibid, <http://www.canalliance.org/documents/prncpen.stm>.

⁶⁸ Quebec's services have been operating for over 25 years, while the Alberta and BC services have been around for about 5 years. There are also three non-provincially mandated evaluation services operating out of Ontario. A 1998 PriceWaterhouse study on foreign academic credential assessment services in Ontario recommended the creation of a new credential assessment service run by the provincial government to overcome the non-systematic approach to foreign academic assessment that goes on in Ontario. Price Waterhouse. *Foreign Academic Credential Assessment Services Business Assessment, Final Report*. Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation, May 1998.

assessing the credentials of prospective applicants by providing accurate and comprehensive information on the comparability of foreign qualifications with Canadian education systems.⁶⁹

Province of Ontario's Holistic Approach

In March 2000, Ontario's ministries of Education and Training, Colleges and Universities announced the creation of a service to assess the academic credentials of immigrant job seekers to help speed their entry into the workforce. Dianne Cunningham, Minister of

In March 2000, Ontario's ministries of Education and Training, Colleges and Universities announced a new service to assess the academic credentials of immigrant job seekers to help speed their entry into the workforce.

Training Colleges and Universities said, "we all benefit when skilled newcomers can enter the labour force quickly and begin contributing to the provincial economy. This service will help qualified immigrants quickly find work to match their educational achievement while at the same time helping employers hire immigrants with the educational background they need".

The new academic credential assessment service, in Ontario, will provide employers, occupational regulatory bodies, academic institutions, private trainers and personnel agencies with high-quality assessments of foreign secondary and post-secondary educational credentials against Ontario standards.⁷⁰

Regional, Municipal and Local Recognition Initiatives

There have been numerous regional, municipal and local credential assessment and PLAR initiatives across Canada in recent years. The Looking Ahead Project, operating in the lower Mainland and the Fraser Valley Regions of British Columbia, is one such example. Initiated in 1999, by Human Resources Development Canada, the Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security, and a variety of other government and non-government partners, the Looking Ahead project is a community-based organization that implements recognition measures to enhance the labour force participation of immigrants.⁷¹ In 1998, the Maytree Foundation, a Canadian charitable foundation in support of social

⁶⁹ See: <http://www.canalliance.org/documents/brochure.en.asp>. Membership in the Alliance is voluntary and open to any private or public credential assessment service that meets a set of quality assurance standards. In 1999 the Alliance established a Quality Assurance Framework which offers effective mechanisms to establish quality criteria and standards among Alliance members. These mechanisms also prescribe consistent standards of good practice to the assessment of educational credentials. As cited in <http://www.canalliance.org/documents/framework.en.stm>.

⁷⁰ Currently, the weak business practices of independent credential assessment agencies in Ontario, for example, do not tailor their product to meet the needs of business, occupational regulatory bodies, educational institutions and foreign-trained individuals. From: Training and Development Associates, John Samuel & Associates Inc., and Le Groupe Stanford. *Reaching our Full Potential: Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition for Foreign-Trained Canadians*. Prepared for PLAR Working Group. Canadian Labour Force Development Board. June 1999. p. 51.

⁷¹ The majority of immigrants and refugees in British Columbia reside in the Lower Mainland and the Fraser Valley regions. Between 1986 and 1996, over 300,000 immigrants settled in this area. As cited in: <http://www.lookingahead.bc.ca>.

justice initiatives, launched the Refugee and Immigrant Program to assist immigrants in accessing suitable employment and to promote the fair recognition of the skills, education and experience they bring with them.⁷²

Entering Regulated and Non-Regulated Occupations

As a rule, if an occupation is regulated, the recognition of qualifications is determined by a provincial or territorial regulatory body, while for non-regulated occupations, recognition is normally at the discretion of the employer.⁷³ Even when an occupation is not regulated, employers can require that an applicant for a job be registered, licensed, or certified with a relevant professional association.

The Looking Ahead Project of B.C., started in 1999 by HRDC, is a community-based organization that implements recognition measures to enhance the labour force participation of immigrants

The CICIC notes that for new Canadians considering entry into a regulated occupation the recognition process varies between provinces and territories and for each profession or trade—with the exception of Red Seal Trades. In many cases recognition can be a costly and time-consuming process. Immigrants can facilitate their transition into work by contacting, before coming to Canada, their home country's own professional association governing their occupation to find out if it has links with similar associations in Canada which will allow quicker and more comprehensive recognition of their foreign credentials. They can also contact the Canadian *National Occupational Classification* publication at any Canadian diplomatic mission to find out more about employment requirements.

Entering Further Education

For new Canadians thinking of studying at a Canadian college or university, CICIC recommends that they contact the office of admissions of the institution and ask about the procedure required for an assessment of their credentials. In most cases, the university or college has the sole authority to make decisions about recognition of credentials for purposes of admission.

The often piecemeal approach currently in practice for recognizing international credentials for work and further education has numerous limitations. Recent actions in Ontario recognize this, and illustrate an effort to move further by offering a more holistic provincial approach to recognizing international credentials and learning.⁷⁴

⁷² The Maytree Foundation is a Canadian charitable foundation established in 1982. For information on the Maytree Foundation go to: <http://www.maytree.com>.

⁷³ From: Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials. *Fact Sheet No. 2: Assessment and recognition of credentials for the purpose of employment in Canada*. 1999. <http://www.cicic.ca/factsheets/factsheet2en.stm>. About 20 per cent of Canadians work in regulated occupations.

⁷⁴ Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. *News Release—Ontario government service to help qualified immigrants find jobs*. March 2000. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/nr/00.03/jobsnr.html>.

European Holistic Approaches to Recognizing Foreign Credentials

There is a clear conviction within the EU that improving transferability is essential to economic well being. The EU is promoting policy in this area as a key to economic success.

In Europe, transferability issues relate especially to concerns about improving academic and labour mobility within the European Union (EU). There is a clear conviction within the EU that improving transferability is essential to economic well being. The EU is

promoting policy in this area as a key to economic success. It views transferability and quality assurance as essential elements in the flow of knowledge and human capital.

The EU efforts include a drive to create a European area of qualifications. While the EU does not support full harmonization of systems and European universities and colleges do not seek it, it is promoting quality, transparency and mobility of credentials.

One significant European initiative to address the issue of transferability of credentials through accreditation and equivalency is the experimental European Credit Transfer System

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is a significant European initiative to address the issue of transferability of credentials through accreditation and equivalency.

(ECTS). The ECTS has been developed by 145 EU universities and is being implemented by over 1,000 institutions. Also important is NARIC, the network of National Academic Recognition Information Centres, created in 1984 by the European Community to improve the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study. A very broad approach to academic

recognition is favoured over *equivalency* of credentials and credits because it is a more global approach to evaluation, going beyond formal credentials and assessing all of a student's education. This approach facilitates the mobility of labour and educational attainment and recognizes the achievements and experiences of those who have gone through different formal and informal educational experiences.

These EU initiatives generally seek a more global approach to evaluation that takes into account the whole of a student's education. The EU approach also fits with a lifelong learning model that transcends formal academic training to encompass all the knowledge and skills gained by individuals over their lifetime. Several dimensions of the recognition issue lend weight to the view that Canada needs new approaches to international recognition and transferability, as part of a larger strategic approach to recognizing learning and learning credentials, in addition to those already underway.

Europe, Canada and the Rest of the World

In April 1997, the countries of the Council of Europe and the UNESCO Europe Region along with Canada signed an agreement that updates a 1979 UNESCO convention on the recognition of studies, diplomas and degrees concerning higher education in the states

belonging to the European Region.⁷⁵ Although the convention has no enforcement mechanism and does not require a university or college to grant admission to applicants claiming equivalent qualifications, it does require that the institution apply *fair and non-discriminatory procedures* in its assessment of the applicants qualifications.

In June 1999, Canada along with the other G-8 nations formally acknowledged the importance of international education by adopting the *Cologne Charter*, part of which calls for “the promotion of the study of foreign languages and an increase in faculty and student international exchanges to increase the understanding of different cultures and enhance mobility in a globalized world”.⁷⁶

Canada has also recently joined a 26-country organization called UMAP, University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific. Created in 1991, UMAP promotes faculty and student mobility through exchanges and institutional cooperation and identifies and reduces barriers to academic mobility. Under UMAP, universities are encouraged to negotiate bilateral agreements which detail the conditions under which student exchanges take place. In an effort to facilitate credit recognition and transfer resulting from student exchanges, UMAP adopted the ECTS model (European Credit Transfer System) for its own University Credit Transfer System (UCTS). Like the ECTS model, the objective of UCTS is to make UMAP more effective by ensuring that credit is granted by students’ home institutions for study undertaken on exchange and to facilitate greater mobility.⁷⁷

The significance of these international initiatives is clear. There is a clear trend in Europe and elsewhere towards more holistic and comprehensive approaches to recognizing learning and learning credentials in support of the better development and employment of people as they move within and between countries. Canada’s efforts need to be informed by these trends and assessed in their light.

⁷⁵ Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials (CICIC). “Fact Sheet No 3: The Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region—What it means for Canada”. <http://www.cicic.ca/factsheets/factsheet3eng.stm>. Canada and other non-European countries including Australia, Israel, Turkey and the United States have been invited to sign and ratify the convention. The convention is designed to improve mobility by encouraging fair and consistent practices in assessment and recognition of qualifications.

⁷⁶ As cited in: Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, *Credit Where Credit is Due – Canadian Universities and the European and Asian Credit Transfer Systems*. June 2000. p.1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 2000. pp. 2-3, 9-10.

Conclusion

Most analysts agree that Canada, like other highly developed nations, faces a range of learning recognition issues that have important economic and social consequences for our country. The widely-held view of experts and stakeholders is that current barriers to holistic recognition of learning and learning credentials in Canada are impairing the ability of the country to put its human resources to best use. These barriers are also restricting the capacity of our businesses to be more productive and profitable, and our people to achieve their personal economic goals.

At the same time, Canada, like its competitors, also faces rising challenges in maintaining an adequate supply of highly skilled and knowledgeable people, with the right kinds of learning and learning credentials, in its labour market. This has profound economic implications for our country. Without an adequate supply of the people that Canada needs to attract, nurture and support in order to ensure the nation's continued economic growth through the creation of high value goods and services, it will not be able to compete successfully in global markets.

Ultimately, analysts conclude, by helping all our people reach their full personal development, and receive full recognition for their learning, Canada enhances the economic basis that ultimately supports its quality of life - the hallmark of Canadian society today.

The challenge facing researchers is to empirically demonstrate that changing the *amount of learning that is recognized* changes the economic well-being of individuals and the country as a whole. ***If it can be shown that recognizing learning is an effective way to increase the supply and productivity of skillful people in our economy with attendant economic benefits, and that there exists a learning recognition gap with associated costs in Canada, then there are grounds for considering that improving learning recognition processes would be a major national strategy for economic advancement.***

The review of literature from Canada and internationally summarized above, suggests strongly that recognition is indeed a significant strategy for developing and employing people fully and that there is a learning recognition gap in Canada today, with significant economic costs and consequences.

The subsequent phases of this research project are testing the truth of our hypothesis that there is much learning to recognize and that the recognized learning has a significant and measurable economic value. Through a series of surveys of stakeholders, employers and employee-students that feed data into an economic modeling process, the Conference Board's research will elucidate the extent and economic cost of non-recognition of learning and explore the economic implications of changing our recognition policies and practices.

The results will be published in a report in May, 2000. Check the Conference Board's website for more information about the report of findings in April, 2000 www.conferenceboard.ca/nbec.

Check the
Conference Board's
website for more
information about the
findings in April,
2001:
www.conferenceboard.ca

Glossary of Terms

Accreditation

Accreditation is a process of evaluating and assessing the quality of an institution or program of post-secondary education. A program is accredited if it successfully passes through that evaluation and assessment, and achieves the status of a recognized program or institution. In Canada, there is no direct system of accreditation of institutions, only for certain programs within institutions.

Credential

A formal document that embodies the recognition and accreditation of learning gained formally or informally. Widely recognized credentials include degrees, diplomas, training certificates, apprenticeship papers, and professional certifications. Credentials gained from PLAR include certificates of competence and credits towards degrees and diplomas or apprenticeship and other trades qualifications. Less widely recognized credentials include employer performance evaluations and employer granted certificates or records of completion of in-house and on-the-job training.

Human Capital

The stock or worth of an individual's knowledge and skills; collectively the sum of the knowledge and skills contained within a workforce. The *underemployment of human capital* occurs when people's knowledge and skills are not fully recognized and used to capacity.

Human Resource

The capacity of an individual to perform in a workplace or some other environment. The *underdevelopment of human resources* occurs when learning or learning credentials are not fully recognized so that individuals' learning and personal development opportunities are delayed, slowed or restricted.

Learning

Includes both knowledge and skills, and the attitudes and behaviours that are developed and expressed as a result of having knowledge and skills. At various times, it refers to the action of receiving instruction or acquiring knowledge and skills; what is learned or taught as a result of instruction, direction, information provided and experience of doing; knowledge and skills acquired by systemic study and practice; and the possession of such knowledge and skills.

Mobility

Glossary of Terms

Mobility normally refers to the capacity to transfer credentials between institutions and across jurisdiction and the recognition or acceptance of the credentials by different jurisdictions, such as provinces, territories or other countries. It is sometimes also used to refer to the capacity of individuals holding credentials to move between jurisdictions and institutions.

Non Regulated Occupation

A profession or trade for which there is no legal requirement or restriction on practice with regard to licenses, certificates, or registration. The vast majority of occupations in Canada fall into this category. For some non-regulated occupations, certification or registration with a professional body is available to applicants on a voluntary basis.

In general, applicants for non-regulated occupations have to demonstrate to employers that they possess the experience and training required for the job. Even when an occupation is not regulated, employers sometimes require that an applicant for a job be registered, licensed, or certified with the relevant professional association.

Requirements for employment in non-regulated occupations range from the very specific to the very general. Employers may expect individuals to demonstrate a certain level of skill and competence, to have completed a certain number of years of education, and to have personal characteristics suitable for the job. Currently, it is the responsibility of the employer to decide whether a qualification earned outside of Canada is equivalent to a Canadian credential. Because registration and certification may be available for certain non-regulated occupations, some employers will require, as a condition for employment, that applicants be registered or certified by the relevant professional association.

Portability

Portability is a term used to describe collectively the mobility of credentials and the transferability of credits.

Prior Learning

Prior learning refers to learning that occurs either in the workplace or through life experience and is not recognized and formally credentialled as it is being acquired.

PLAR (Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition)

PLAR is the process for assessing and recognizing learning that was not credentialled as it was being acquired, in order to create a credential.

Recognition

Recognition refers to two processes: the process of assessing and accepting existing formal learning credentials; and the process of assessing and credentialling learning, gained through training, work experience and life experience, that was not credentialled as it was

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being acquired.

Red Seal Trade

A [*Red Seal*](#) trade is a trade for which all provinces and territories have agreed on standards for entry into the occupation, allowing for the portability of qualifications across Canada. [*Red Seal*](#) trades are designated by the Inter-provincial Standards Program under the authority of the Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship, the body that is also responsible for setting standards in the designated trades. The [*Red Seal*](#) is a passport that allows the holder to work anywhere in Canada without having to write further examinations.

Regulated Occupation

Regulated occupations are professions and trades controlled by provincial, territorial and sometimes federal law and governed by a professional organization or regulatory body. The regulatory body sets entry requirements and standards of practice, assesses applicants' qualifications and credentials, certifies, registers, and licenses qualified applicants, and disciplines members. To work in a regulated occupation and to use a regulated title, an individual must have a license or certificate or be registered with the regulatory body for their occupation. Some occupations are only regulated in certain provinces and territories. Entry, which can vary among provinces, usually requires a combination of examinations passed, a specified period of supervised work experience, and demonstration of language competency plus other achievements.

Each regulated occupation sets its own requirements for assessment and recognition, usually through the provincial or territorial professional association or regulatory body. (In some cases, there are federal requirements for recognition.) In order to qualify for practice in Canada, an individual may be required to undergo professional and language examinations, submit to a review of your qualifications, and undertake a period of supervised work experience.

Trade

A trade is an occupation generally regarded as requiring one to three years of post secondary education at a community college or university, two to four years of apprenticeship training, two to three years of on-the-job training, or a combination of these requirements. Some trades are regulated which means that a license/certificate is required to practice in such cases.

Transferability

The capacity to transfer credits across a provincial, national or international jurisdiction or between organizations and institutions so that they are accepted. It is sometimes also used

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to refer to the transfer of credentials.

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