

## **Education for Employment: the Canadian Experience**

Paul Brennan

Vice President, International Partnerships

Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC)

### **I. Introduction**

The Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) is the national and international voice of Canada's 150 colleges, institutes, polytechnics and universities with a college mandate. With campuses in 1,000 urban, rural and remote communities, over 1.5 million learners, and 60,000 educators and professionals, these institutions draw students equally from all socio-economic backgrounds and supply graduates with the advanced skills essential to Canada's economic growth and productivity.

Colleges want their students to get meaningful employment after graduating. Key performance indicators show – on average over 90 percent of college students have jobs 6 months after graduating, student satisfaction is 85 percent, and employer satisfaction with the graduates employed is 93 percent.

In addition to the 2 and 3 year technician/technologist Diploma programs that were originally their primary mandate, in response to demand colleges now offer 4 year Applied Bachelor degree programs and one-year Post-graduate certificates where the majority of students are university graduates who need more practical skills and internships to obtain employment.

Because of the responsiveness of college programs to the needs of society, Canada has the highest percentage of its population attending colleges (30%) and the highest share of secondary school graduates compared to universities (48%).

The history of ACCC in international development is extensive. Since 1985, it has implemented over 560 education and training projects involving 102 countries funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, multilateral institutions, such as Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and World Bank, and other Federal government agencies of Canada. In Asia, ACCC has had a long-time working relationship with ADB, both in preparing and implementing skills development initiatives in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam.

### **II. Colleges: Common Values**

Colleges are firmly rooted in the communities they serve and are seen as the hub of community response and local socio-economic well-being. They provide a base to attract economic activity, retain residents, and help communities prosper which are all critical for the quality of life. They must also reflect the diversity of the communities they serve and be open to all citizens who wish to learn.

Colleges are often the only post-secondary institution in the region they serve and provide access to all who want to learn. They play five (5) major roles: (i) occupational preparation; (ii) lifelong learning, (iii) applied research and technology transfer to SMEs (iv) contract and customized training; (v) entrepreneurship and small business development.

Above all, colleges are focused on learners and their success in obtaining employment and gaining the confidence needed to become active citizens. An entire set of student services have been developed to ensure their success in learning, from pre-technology programs to help adults and high-school drop-outs gain missing skills, to academic and personal counseling, to financial advice, to support for learners with various disabilities and to services to ensure appropriate internships and job obtention.

Colleges are the advanced skills educators of choice. ACCC consciously uses the new words of providers of “advanced skills for employment” and “Education for Employment” rather than the tired TVET term which has negative and low-level connotations to many.

In a complex world with multiple clients and accountabilities pulling in different directions, achieving shared values are one of the best guarantors of cohesive and effective implementation of changes and of sustainable institutional transformations.

### **III. The College – Employer Partnership for Employment**

The platform for the core partnership between colleges and employers consists of nine (9) areas. These are: (i) labor market information; (ii) skills standards and accreditation; (iii) curriculum and instructional materials development; (iv) employability or soft skills; (v) faculty updating; (vi) internships and co-op education; (vii) equipment and financial contributions; (viii) technology transfer and applied research; and (ix) evaluation of graduate success.

It is the development of productive and efficient relationships with employers in each of these areas that is the critical success factor in having a relevant, accessible, and cost-efficient public system. Employers voluntarily serve on these committees now, allow us to train on their sites, donate equipment and now even help to build new campuses and buildings. To talk of such a partnership is easy; to make it come to life and become ever-more productive is the difficult art.

### **IV. A Brief Statement on the Relationship of Engineers with Technicians and Technologists**

In Canada, six (6) industries – consulting, manufacturing, construction, government, utilities, and oil and gas – account for three-quarters of engineering and technology employment in 2008. The skills mix (engineer – technicians/technologists – skilled craftsmen) approximates the ILO standard: 1:5-7:25. It highlights the vibrant occupational relationship and differentiation of roles, i.e. engineers as “problem-solvers” and technicians as “doers”. In many developing and emerging countries, and even some developed ones, our historic preference for academic universities above all, has meant that one ends up with too many university graduates for the available employment, and masses of citizens who could not make the university feeling inadequate and having no advanced skills for employment or job creation. This is what needs to be reversed in the current new high skill and high knowledge economy.

### **V. Recommendations re Programs for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth**

1. Approach loans as **economic development and job creation support programs** instead of educational reform programs. Start with which economic sectors have jobs, work with employer associations to determine specific needs

and then move to find the right institutions to meet those needs. Ensure engagement and contributions by the economic sectors above all. Let the results in key economic sectors then drive sustainable education system changes instead of the reverse, which rarely happens.

2. Adopt an **integrated three-tiered approach**: strengthening (1) Ministries and government agencies, (2) Training institutions and employer associations in priority sectors, and (3) networks which can support and increase the pace and sustainability of change. Too often programs focus only on ministries, or on institutions, or on equipment only, when an integrated approach to change is needed to attain sustainable transformation of culture and operations.
3. Explore an **institutional partnership approach** rather than the traditional individual expert/consultant approach. This approach leverages so many more institutional resources and organizational change lessons, sets up lasting two-way individual and institutional partnerships and exchanges, and does not leave one dependent on individual experts who come and go. Lasting results are there to see of such an approach in China, Vietnam, India, Brazil, Chile, Sénégal, Tanzania and many other countries where ACCC has had such a partnership approach to development assistance and international exchanges.
4. Explore **new accountability frameworks**, such as “Key Performance Indicators” (KPIs) which focus attention and funding on: graduation rate, student satisfaction, graduate employment and graduate satisfaction 6 months later, employer satisfaction and employer engagement. What you measure is what you pay attention to and in Canada these have had an excellent effect on the entire system, reducing the gaps between the highest and lowest performers in a short period.
5. Focus on **leadership development and values** if one wants to not only effect a few changes but obtain sustainable transformations of systems and cultures. ACCC has run a series of very popular summer leadership development programs for college presidents and for other levels of senior staff and it has led to significant changes and a network of exchange between leaders. ACCC has undertaken similar programs abroad with countries like Vietnam, Sénégal, Tanzania, and of course China under its VELT program. And now under the World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics which will hold its first Global Leadership Development session in Halifax in May 2012, just before the WFCP World Congress ([www.wfcp.org](http://www.wfcp.org)).