

Standing Committee on Finance (FINA)

Pre-budget consultations 2012

Bow Valley College

Responses

1. Economic Recovery and Growth

Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?

Bow Valley College supports the Association of Canadian Community College's call for a national dialogue among provincial/territorial governments, educational institutions, the private sector and civil society to identify measures to mitigate Canada's demographic deficit, skills shortage, and innovation challenge. The greatest benefit to our society is an individual who achieves his or her full potential. Focused attention on the development of the labour force, with particular attention on disadvantaged and vulnerable Canadians, promises significant and positive outcomes for addressing the labour shortage and promoting productive and safer workplaces. Canadian colleges and institutes play a vital role in developing the labour force and addressing the skills shortage. We are known for being nimble with adjusting our program mix to ensure continuing relevance to a changing economy. By consulting industry regularly, we ensure our credit programming develops work-ready graduates with the range of skills and competencies to be full and resilient participants in the economy.

2. Job Creation

As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?

1. Support Canada's significant community of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as part of a national job creation strategy. Increased support for skills development and innovation in Canada's SME sector will generate measurable returns on productivity gains and job creation. 2. Prioritize and address youth unemployment within the Youth Employment Strategy to curb long-term economic and social impacts. Youth unemployment is nearly double that of the general working-aged population. This is particularly problematic because, according to the OECD, unemployment and other labour market difficulties (e.g., systemic short-term contracts) encountered early in working lives can have long term and negative impacts on career paths and future earning potential. Therefore, increase opportunities for youth to access essential skills development and upskilling opportunities that are tied to workplace experience. 3. Invest in and market Canadian education abroad. Intercultural skills and working with others are valuable soft skills sought by employers. Additionally, established international networks among future industry leaders facilitate international trade potential. a. Market Canadian education abroad to attract quality international students who, in turn, often choose to stay in Canada. b. Support international mobility opportunities that facilitate Canadian students with attaining the international experience that employers value. c. Support and enhance Canada's participation in international education development projects that promote goodwill and the growth of emerging economies and markets.

3. Demographic Change

What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?

Addressing the two challenges of an aging society and skills shortage require a comprehensive and cross-sectorial approach, yet it is apparent that Canada's community colleges will play a vital role in any solution. Relative to economic participation, some of the biggest gains stand to be made by engaging populations that are both underrepresented in learning and the economy. These include Aboriginals and immigrants.

1. Promote educational parity among Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal population is on average much younger than the general population and growing at a rate that far exceeds that of the general population. As a group, Aboriginals are underrepresented in both learning and the workforce, resulting in lost social and economic growth potential for Canada. Therefore, balance investments in First Nations and Inuit K-12 education with investments in post-secondary education and adult upgrading focused on engagement of Aboriginal Canadians.
2. Improve employment outcomes of newcomers to Canada. Too many immigrants are stuck in survival jobs or unemployment, which is a critical loss to an economy already impacted by acute labour shortages. Facilitate the development and growth of programs and services that aid immigrants with securing viable employment congruent with their skills and potential. This includes connecting newcomers to language training, foreign credential recognition, Canadian workplace experience, and workplace training. In particular, work with providers to explore and deliver distributed learning and training opportunities to smaller cities and rural Canada, thus encouraging the transfer of skills to underskilled areas of the country.

4. Productivity

With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?

1. Develop the essential skills of Canadians, with emphasis on adult literacy skills. Literacy skills are socially and economically important, yet nearly half of Canadian adults do not have the level of literacy skills considered necessary to cope in today's knowledge economy. If left unaddressed, this has consequences for economic productivity, workplace safety, individual health outcomes, and reliance on social transfers to individuals. Therefore, remedial measures should focus on literacy assessment and development and focused workplace training.
2. Enhance the capacity of colleges and other service providers to help integrate skilled and professional immigrants into the Canadian labour market and in roles congruent with their skills and potential. For immigrant professionals who arrive at Canada's doorstep, navigating the systems and processes to resume their occupations is difficult for those unfamiliar with our models of professional regulation.
3. Increase federal investments that support college-industry partnerships, which foster added capacity among industries to increase productivity. Colleges are responsive to industry needs and are natural catalysts of incremental innovation and growing the pool of highly skilled people needed to meet acute labour shortages affecting key industries.
4. Increase applied research allocations within the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. Many applied research activities are concerned with expanding teaching and learning models of delivery and supports to engage diverse learners, developing innovative products or processes of economic and social consequence, and identifying and developing industry-specific solutions. These outcomes support social and economic systems and demonstrate a flow through of benefits to private and public industries relative to enhanced productivity and competitiveness.

5. Other Challenges

With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?

Provide a strong base for attracting economic activity, retaining residents, and maintaining quality of life in rural and smaller communities. Colleges have a long tradition of serving rural and smaller communities as well as facilitating rural revitalization through local and regional economic development. Therefore, invest in college-industry partnerships, including applied research and local labour force training solutions.