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Chair

Mr. Ed Komarnicki

Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

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● (0900)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC)): I call the meeting to order.

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to meeting number 48 of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities on Thursday, October 4, 2012.

We are starting a little late this morning. As you may well know, we changed locations from the Centre Block, where we meet normally, and that has caused a bit of confusion.

I know that Mr. Cleary is on his way and should be here any moment. We thank you, Mr. Cardozo, for being patient with us. Also Aleksandra Popovic, who was supposed to be here, was not able to make it to Ottawa. I understand that she will be joining Mr. Cardozo sometime during our hearing this morning via video conference.

As you know, we are studying the general area of fixing the skills gap, addressing existing labour shortages in high-demand occupations, understanding labour shortages, and addressing barriers to filling low-skill jobs.

We will start with your presentation, Mr. Cardozo, and after you have completed it, there will be rounds of questioning starting at that point. If Ms. Popovic should arrive, we'll hear her presentation as well. I see that Mr. Cleary has just joined us, so we have the full committee here.

Mr. Cardozo, if you wish to proceed, go ahead.

Mr. Andrew Cardozo (Executive Director, Alliance of Sector Councils): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you for this invitation, which we consider to be very important.

Could I be so bold as to ask if you could introduce the members around the table?

The Chair: Absolutely. Perhaps we will start with Mr. Eyking and work our way through. Go ahead.

The Honourable Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): My name is Mark Eyking and I'm a member of Parliament from Cape Breton, Nova Scotia.

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): I am François Lapointe.

[*Translation*]

I am the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup.

I am wondering if the interpretation is working. If I speak to you longer in French, are you getting the English version?

It seems to be working.

[*English*]

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): My name is Ryan Cleary. I'm the member of Parliament for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, and that's in Newfoundland and Labrador.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Good morning. I am sorry for being late.

I am Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet, member for Hochelaga. My riding is on Montreal Island, where the botanical gardens and the Olympic stadium are.

[*English*]

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): I'm Mike Sullivan, from York South—Weston, which is in the west part of Toronto.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Good morning. My name is Kellie Leitch. I'm the member of Parliament for Simcoe—Grey and the Parliamentary Secretary for Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): I'm Colin Mayes, member of Parliament for Okanagan—Shuswap in British Columbia.

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): I'm Joe Daniel, member of Parliament for Don Valley East, in Toronto.

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): I am Phil McColeman, member of Parliament for Brant.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): My name is Devinder Shory. I'm the member of Parliament for Calgary Northeast in the province of Alberta.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Good morning. I'm Brent Rathgeber, the member of Parliament for Edmonton—St. Albert.

The Chair: Ms. Popovic has arrived. Welcome. Make yourself comfortable.

That done, we will have Mr. Cardozo start his presentation, and after he has completed it, you're certainly welcome, Ms. Popovic, to make your presentation if you're ready. Is there anything you'd like to say at this moment?

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic (Program Manager, Workplace Skills and Training, ABC Life Literacy Canada): Only thank you very much for having me. We are in a beautiful downtown building in Toronto that has just recently been renovated. It's wonderful to be here. Thank you so much.

The Chair: All right.

With that, Mr. Cardozo, please begin your presentation.

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: Thank you so much, Mr. Chair and members. Thank you for the introductions too, and the chance to be here to talk about the issues you're dealing with.

[*Translation*]

I am going to talk about five trends, namely, shifting economic powers, changing demographics, growth of knowledge, labour market mismatches, and the changing nature of work.

[*English*]

I will go through my slides fairly quickly so that I can cover the five trends in five minutes.

The first trend is the shifting economic powers in the world. Goldman Sachs has predicted that by the year 2050, China will be the number one economic power in terms of GDP, the U.S. number two, and India number three. Canada will slip in a sense, from number 10 to number 16, somewhere between Vietnam and the Philippines. I say “slip in a sense” because it won't necessarily slip; it's that the other powers will become stronger.

The relevance of that in terms of human capital is that it may affect the flow of human capital—not only financial capital, but human capital—as people may find certain countries less attractive than they do today.

The second trend is changing demographics. You are well aware of the aging population in Canada. There are some figures here comparing Canada to some of the other countries. Interestingly, it is the aboriginal population in Canada that is the youngest. I've got some figures to demonstrate that the median age of the aboriginal population is presently about 26.5, which is considerably less than the median age of 39.7 for the rest of the population.

● (0905)

The third trend that is interesting for human resource issues is the growth in knowledge. There is a projection that 60% of kids currently in kindergarten will work in jobs that do not currently exist. We are educating young people and kids for jobs that don't exist. That is part of the challenge ahead of us.

In terms of the growth in knowledge, there's an estimate that somewhere between 65% and 81% of young people and workers in the future will require post-secondary education, including university, college, and apprenticeship. We are essentially expecting the next generation to be both generalists and specialists: to have a fair amount of knowledge about a lot of different things, and at the same time be specialists as we specialize knowledge in a number of different areas.

Trend number four, which you are certainly well aware of, is the labour market mismatch. Dr. Rick Miner, whom you know, has talked about people without jobs and jobs without people. I've listed for you a number of the shortages that are projected for the next decade in their sectors of the economy. How did we get to this point? Certainly aging population is a major part of it, along with growth of the economy, rapidly changing technical requirements, a high level of issues with regard to adult literacy, and the high unemployment level among aboriginal people.

Some of the solutions to better align supply and demand are higher levels of literacy; workforce growth through immigration, which is a part of the solution; including aboriginal peoples more, and focusing more on their education attainment and job attainment; and the inclusion in the workplace of people with disabilities, older workers, and women in non-traditional occupations.

To go about this, we need a national skills strategy. By that I mean a skills strategy that involves all levels of governments, business, the education system across the country, and a number of other stakeholders.

The last trend that I want to mention is the changing nature of work. Career paths are changing by necessity because long-term jobs are hard to find or because upscaling becomes essential or both. The next slide, a brilliant slide by Professor Sylvain Bourdon of the Université de Sherbrooke, demonstrates through these three bars the changing nature of work.

In the first one, the traditional model, people were educated for about 20 years, worked for about 40 years, and then retired.

In the second model, which he has called the lengthened youth transition, people are educated for about 20 years, then for a period of another five or 10 years go back and forth through education and training and back through the work world. Then they get a steady job, work for another 30 years, and retire.

The third model is what he has called the lifelong learning model. This model has both positives and negatives to it. It shows people having a series of jobs that change on a regular basis. They transfer between jobs and training, periods of unemployment, and then periods when they do a bit of both; they may have unemployment and training at the same time, or work and training at the same time. The positives are that people engage in lifelong learning; the negatives are that it is increasingly difficult for people to have both long-term employment and long-term full-time employment.

Some of this happens through necessity: people often have to piece together two or three jobs, all or most of which are not very long term. Contract work, short-term work, is becoming more the norm. This is unsettling both for individuals and for the economy. It is harder for people in uncertain jobs to buy houses, cars, or other major purchases.

● (0910)

Those cover the five tendencies. Let me close with a couple of comments.

I work with the Alliance of Sector Councils, which is an alliance of some 30 organizations that deal with skills development in specific areas of the economy. Some of those were demonstrated in the two slides in which I showed you the skills shortages that exist. Councils deal with a number of issues, with labour market information being the core of what sector councils do. They cover issues such as aboriginal engagement, occupational standards, working with internationally trained workers, and workplace learning.

The rest of the slides, which I won't go through at this time, Mr. Chair, because of time constraints, cover some of the interesting and innovative solutions that various sector councils are involved in. The last slide I have is simply a listing of all the councils with their logos.

There are other important trends out there. One of the trends that I haven't talked about today is certainly the issue around literacy, and I'm very pleased that my colleague today will be talking about that in more detail. She certainly has a lot more expertise and knowledge of the issue than I do.

That covers my comments. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that informative presentation. I'm sure you'll have the opportunity to answer some questions, and hopefully you can address some of the innovative solutions that you spoke of.

We are interested to hear from Ms. Popovic with respect to the literacy side of things. If you would like to commence your presentation, please go ahead.

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning everyone. Indeed, *bonjour*. My name is Aleksandra Popovic and I'm with ABC Life Literacy Canada.

At ABC, we envision a Canada where everyone has the literacy skills they need to live a fully engaged life. Literacy is the core work that ABC does, including workforce literacy, community literacy, and workplace literacy. ABC has had the privilege of appearing before this committee several times to speak to the importance of literacy and essential skills for Canadians. We appreciate this privilege.

Today I'm pleased to be able to address you about this issue within the context of addressing existing labour shortages in high-demand occupations. We believe, and research demonstrates, that the weak literacy skills and essential skills of Canadians are directly related to the difficulties employers are having in finding the trained workers they need. When I speak of the essential skills, I'm referring to reading, writing—

The Chair: May I interrupt you for a moment? We're translating simultaneously, so if you could slow up in your presentation, it would help the translator immensely. Perhaps you could back up a bit and start again and speak a little more slowly.

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: Absolutely.

ABC has had the privilege of appearing before this committee several times to speak to the importance of literacy and essential skills for Canadians. We appreciate being able to do so.

Today I'm pleased to be able to speak to you about this issue within the context of addressing existing labour shortages in high-demand occupations. We believe, and research demonstrates, that the weak literacy and essential skills of Canadians are directly related to the difficulties employers are having in finding the trained workers they need. When I speak of the essential skills, I'm referring to reading, writing, document use, and numeracy, which collectively are known as literacy skills, as well as oral communications, computer skills, thinking skills, working with others, and continuous learning.

Research undertaken earlier this year by Rogers Connect market research group on behalf of ABC Life Literacy Canada indicates that 80% of Canadian business leaders find it difficult to find qualified employees. More relevant to this committee, nearly half of these respondents attributed this difficulty to the low literacy and essential skills levels of Canada's labour pool.

The essential skills we looked at in this survey are not technical skills or job-specific skills required by particular occupations but, rather, the skills applied in all occupations. Those are the essential skills I just referred to.

Poor and low-level literacy and essential skills are a reality throughout Canada. According to the last international assessment in 2003, 42% of Canadians are at low levels of literacy. That means they fall below a high school graduate's level of literacy and struggle with common tasks. On a scale of one through five, it is generally understood that possessing essential skills at a minimum of level three complexity is required to manage the demands of day-to-day tasks in work, in one's life, and in learning.

New international research on the literacy and essential skill levels of Canadians is due to be released next year. It is known as the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies. Sadly, early indications suggest that we will not see significant improvement in these scores. This reality is seen in workplaces across the country.

Please allow me to illustrate the impact this deficiency has on the lives of some Canadians.

A personal support worker misses out on training opportunities because she cannot read the information flyer she received with her pay stub. Her manager assumes she’s not interested.

A machine operator does not follow safe handling procedures of a chemical because he does not understand the MSDS.

Each month, a grocery store clerk misses his shift the first day after the new schedule is posted.

● (0915)

At a production team meeting, an employee is reluctant to share a good idea that would lead to efficiencies, for fear she would be asked to speak in front of everyone or maybe even write it down. Her supervisor finds her disengaged.

A maintenance worker is unaware of the implementation of a new alarm system because he does not know that the posted memo is intended for him.

A cashier is regularly short in his till.

A powder-coating company has an excellent team with incredible workmanship on all orders to date. Suddenly, there is a sharp increase in errors on job specifications just after a computerized system is introduced on the production floor.

The company newsletter includes important graphs and projections for the coming year that a line operator doesn't realize forecasts a decline in sales that could likely result in a shortage of work.

Employees in a hospital must now log into the intranet to access relevant information, and their manager is finding that many are missing important deadlines.

A newly hired employee signs her employment contract without reading the policies and procedures.

Increasingly, we see Canadian business and employers, large and small, recognizing the importance of improving the skills of Canadians. For instance, I point to the Canadian Chamber of Commerce's recent report, "Top 10 Barriers to Competitiveness", which puts skills training at number one. Their more recent report on consultations around this clearly identifies literacy and essential skills as a problem to be addressed. I quote:

> We need to focus seriously on upgrading the skills of our existing employees.
>
> Our members told us the dismaying story of a workforce which often lacks basic skills—literacy, numeracy, communication skills.
>
> Canada urgently needs to revamp its policies, programs and attitudes to support continuous, life-long learning and skills upgrading.

The Chamber of Commerce goes on to recommend that the business community step up its investment in workplace training.

At ABC we couldn't agree more. We believe that improving the literacy and essential skills of Canadians is a shared responsibility. Governments, employers, literacy organizations, employees, and Canadians in general have a role to play. It is not one sector's fault or responsibility; we must all work together to find the solutions, especially for our high-demand sectors and jobs.

In the view of ABC Life Literacy Canada, we believe this committee could make a significant contribution to the improvement of this issue by making recommendations that call on a more integrated approach that engages government, business, literacy providers, and individual Canadians. For too long the existing system has served Canadians in a scattered approach, yielding inadequate improvement in literacy and essential skills of Canadians.

When my colleague, ABC President Margaret Eaton, appeared before you last year, she illustrated the effectiveness and impact of integrated programs at diamond mines in the Northwest Territories. The training programs include literacy and basic skills, the opportunity to attain a GED diploma, and job-specific training on equipment and systems. The program has become a model for other industries and sectors that need a large, highly skilled workforce, such as forestry and energy.

Most important to the conversation this morning, this program was partially funded by the territorial government and partially by the employer, and it included a contribution of time from the employees.

Large employers typically play a significant and large role in the programs such as the one I've just highlighted, but skills-based, high-demand jobs are found with employers both large and small. The small and medium-sized employer sector, the acknowledged engine of Canadian employment, cannot be left out of this conversation. Integrated policies and measures need to be found that provide the means to help the employees of small and medium-sized businesses where there are also high-demand jobs.

In this committee's report, "Skills Development in Remote Rural Communities in an Era of Fiscal Restraint", tabled in June, recommendations included a tax credit supporting private sector training programs aimed at the aboriginal population in remote communities.

● (0920)

ABC Life Literacy Canada was pleased to see this in your report.

As a long-standing advocate of policy measures that would incent employers to come to the table to support essential skills training, we urge you to consider similar recommendations to truly incent a shared approach to essential skills training in Canada. A tax credit for essential skills training in the workplace would go a significant way in this regard and encourage employers, large and small, to invest in essential skills training.

Through such measures, the leadership of our federal government can help ensure that our workforce has the skills that will allow Canadians to be successful in those high-demand jobs and ensure that Canadian business thrives.

Thank you for the opportunity for appearing before you this morning.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Popovic, for that presentation.

We will now open this committee hearing to questions. We'll start with Mr. Cleary—no, it's Mr. Lapointe. I'm sorry about that.

Go ahead, Monsieur Lapointe.

Mr. François Lapointe: Thank you, Chair. Sorry, Brian.

Do you speak French? Do we know if your translation device works, Madam Popovic? We can't hear you anymore.

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: I don't know if my translation was occurring. I didn't hear it here in the room.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe: I will speak in French. Are you hearing the simultaneous interpretation?

[*English*]

Can we take it out of my time, please?

● (0925)

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: Yes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe: Ms. Popovic, since the simultaneous interpretation is working, I will speak in French.

I am very pleased to have you here today. I have really had the good fortune to coordinate projects in new technologies with a number of literacy groups in the Chaudière-Appalaches region in Quebec. It was quite an education for me.

Could you please tell us what percentage of Canadians are not level 3 literate? These are people at levels 1 and 2 who have significant difficulty in understanding any written instruction in a work environment.

[*English*]

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: It's understood that approximately 42%, so four out of ten Canadians, on average struggle at below level 3. Level 3 is considered the level at which you can cope with day-to-day tasks and manage as changes occur in your job and in your—

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe: We are talking about close to 12 million Canadians. That is a huge number.

Based on my personal experience, I am convinced that a good portion of people who are seen as so-called "lazy" workers by some of my colleagues—and I am using major quotes there—are in fact people who have this problem. For them, the simple fact of going to apply for a job at a service station, where the cash register is really a computer, is beyond their reach because they do not have these essential skills. Imagine what might happen if these 12 million people had the essential skills needed to truly integrate into the labour force.

In your opinion, the efforts being made by Canada to bring these 12 million Canadians—or at lest 6 or 7 million of them who are certainly old enough to work—to obtain these essential skills, are they appropriate and sufficient, given this enormous problem? Are we really missing the mark when it comes to the resources to start to resolve the problem?

[*English*]

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: I have myself witnessed some wonderful workforce and workplace preparation programming that does address essential skills.

Really excellent models are ones that are locally based. They take into consideration the community needs, the local labour market, the cultural elements, and the needs that surround individuals in terms of other supports to allow them to work. Examples of where this approach would be effective might be communities where individuals who would like to work cannot access appropriate supports for their personal, emotional, psychological, or physical needs. In some cases, this support includes being able to find adequate child care to be able to work on a regular basis.

Programs in workplaces and workforce programs in communities that link directly to the kinds of job-specific and technical skills needed in the local community tend to be a really good model. In other words, underlying essential skills are addressed on an ongoing basis and made incredibly relevant to the adult, because they are immediately applied to the work they are undertaking in their jobs or to the jobs they would like to compete for in their local community.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe: Ms. Popovic, everything you have just told us is absolutely correct but, on the ground, I have only met high-performance organizations, people who are completely dedicated but also poorly paid. The instructors worked 40 hours a week for $15 an hour and helped 12, 15 or 30 people a week. These people were systematically underfunded and received their funding just one year at a time. They are making ends meet for 2012, but they cannot say if they will be able to continue the same activities in 2013.

Can we say that the problem of underfunding experienced by these organizations that, as you said, are so important, is generalized in Canada?

[*English*]

The Chair: Could we have a short response? Mr. Lapointe's time is up.

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: Indeed, this is a problem we do find. The very tight budgets, the annual revisiting of the budget, and determining whether or not programming can be sustained are critical issues for the organizations that try to deliver this kind of programming.

In workplaces, it's really important to have expert educators who can analyze jobs and determine what kinds of underlying essential skills are being applied to various tasks an employee must undertake. That kind of individual is critical, and to continue to fund both essential skills and literacy programs through colleges, through communities, and through trainers at large who are able to undertake this kind of work for employers will truly be a critical contribution to making an ongoing change to the underlying essential skills and literacy issues, both in workplaces and for any Canadian who is part of the workforce but is not working.

● (0930)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe: So this is a plan covering several years.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you for that response.

We'll move on to the next questioner, Mr. Daniel.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to both the witnesses for quite an enlightening view of what's happening in the education field, etc.

As I'm sure you're both fully aware, the responsibility for basic literacy and education lies with the provinces. Obviously, somewhere we're missing the boat in terms of educating people from that perspective.

Do you have any suggestions on how the federal government can work with private industry and the educational institutions to accurately communicate the needs of certain sectors for educational institutions?

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: Sir, I can go first.

Thank you very much for your question, Mr. Daniel

Certainly I think the solution lies in a lot of partners working together. From a federal perspective, we want to think about Canada as a whole in terms of having a competitive economy. When we're thinking about competition with China or India or Argentina, it's Canada as a whole, as a workforce, as an economy, that we look at in terms of competing.

The other aspect for the federal government to be interested in is the issue of mobility. Canadians want to be able to move from province to province, and employers want to be able to employ people from wherever they're coming from. Even though the federal government doesn't have a direct role, as you point out, in education and training, it certainly can have a convening role, and to some extent it has played that role.

Many provinces are very much interested in a national approach that would have the federal government at the table. Indeed the current minister of HRDC was at the meeting of the Forum of Labour Market Ministers for the first time a couple of years ago. That's a forum that had fallen away, to an extent. I'm glad to say that all the ministers, federal and provincial, see it as a really important forum for working together.

In terms of working with industry, Ms. Popovic mentioned the report by the Chamber of Commerce. I think a number of the business organizations have become very concerned about and interested in the issue of skills shortages, especially in the past year or two, more than ever before.

Of course the sector councils, which I'm part of, bring together industry members with educators and government to work on these solutions. We don't deal with advocacy and we don't deal with advice that much; we deal with developing solutions, developing workplace learning, developing standards, and developing labour market information that is useful to employers.

Mr. Joe Daniel: Do you have any comments on that, Ms. Popovic?

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: Yes. I concur with my colleague that the national convening role is a critical one, one where we are offering champions. We are able to identify and highlight for Canadians the kind of good work that is going on in the high-demand sectors, with employers who are putting workplace training to the forefront of what they do with their employees and supporting awareness around the need for continued and lifelong learning. They are moving forward in that way with the populations who are in greatest need.

● (0935)

Mr. Joe Daniel: My next question is related to delving deeper into the unskilled labour force. The implication of what you have said is that our educational system is failing Canadians. One of the things that's happening is that because of the unprecedented skills and labour shortage, businesses are being forced to hire temporary foreign workers to fill these jobs.

Is that something that correlates with this issue? How do you see that picture?

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: Are you addressing me?

Mr. Joe Daniel: Yes—well, both of you.

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: I think our education system is one of the strongest internationally. We do see a significant number of people coming forward with graduate degrees and so forth.

The interesting thing is that the learning that needs to go on in the workplace is slightly different from what might come through in the academic school system. I have seen numerous programs in community colleges that do a very good job of looking at what is needed in trades and skilled work.

There's a great effort by our educational system, but there is an entire layer of literacy and essential skills development that is the foundation and that supports any further education. For adults who struggle with literacy and essential skills, that is an important and different type of approach. That isn't to take away from our educational system, but it is to say that there is another approach and another type of learning that best suits adults who have gone through the system but continue to have low skills.

The Chair: Mr. Daniel, your time is up.

Mr. Cardozo, if you wish to make a comment, go ahead.

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: I'll just briefly add a couple of points. I think Mr. Daniel points to a very interesting point about our educational system. I think in some ways our society as a whole is not reaching its potential. There are a certain number of kids who don't graduate from high school, but in Toronto, for example, 50% of the young people who graduate from high school do not go on to post-secondary education thereafter. That's a real concern.

One of the things we're doing at Alliance of Sector Councils is developing a curriculum for grades 11 and 12 so that kids who don't go on to post-secondary education are able to have some job-ready skills. That has really been quite effective and useful in terms of being able to make school more relevant and interesting to people who don't want to be sticking in school until the end of grade 12. Secondly, it gets them a job fairly soon afterward.

The other part we really have to deal with is changing our culture. Perhaps because we've had a public education system across Canada that is fairly well developed, employers have stayed out of the game of education. We've had a system in which the state deals with education and employers employ, and the two don't mix.

I think we really need to look at the two mixing and at more of a European model. There employers are actively involved in everything from literacy training to lifelong learning. As we have considerable technological advances happening in most sectors, lifelong learning becomes much more important, so employers have to be engaged in that with their workers all through their working career.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Cardozo.

We will now move to Mr. Cleary.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Cardozo, I found one of the statements in your opening very interesting. You talked about how jobs don't yet exist for children in kindergarten, and I was thinking, when you said that, about how much of a challenge that must be for educators. I was also thinking about how there must be a real emphasis on the basics like math, science, English, French—the basics.

Then I heard your presentation, Ms. Popovic, and I heard what you had to say in terms of weak literacy rates, in terms of the 42% of Canadians you mentioned with low literacy skills and the challenge that deficiency is for employers in addressing low productivity and that sort of thing.

Mr. Daniel, when he asked his question, began with noting that the individual provinces are responsible for basic education.

My question is this: in the school system—primary, elementary, and high school—do students have the basics? Are our school systems doing the job?

● (0940)

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: I'll start. Certainly our sense is that while we do have a very good high school system and college and university system, a large number of employers find that when graduating students come to them, they might have a certain level of technical knowledge, but they don't have what are sometimes referred to as the soft skills, the essential skills that Ms. Popovic was referring to, so there are a whole lot of things.

They may have literacy and numeracy, but not have experience in computers or in working with other people—working in teams, for example—which are key parts of the service.

What we've been able to do as the Alliance of Sector Councils, as the voice of employers on human resource issues, is to convey to colleges and universities, and in some cases high schools, that what they are doing is great, but that additional things are needed.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Cardozo, may I stop you there for a second? I'm not talking about colleges and universities; I'm talking about basic education. Maybe this would be better answered by Ms. Popovic.

When young people leave high school, do they have the basics?

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: For the most part, what we have seen is that adults who are today struggling with low literacy and essential skills for one reason or another—and certainly there are multiple factors—did not get from the school system what they needed.

Changes that are occurring in the Canadian school systems have been significant in trying to address the issue of the traditional academic approach to learning, the system that educated the adults who today struggle with those literacy and essential skills. An example might be some of the high school diplomas and the variations of diplomas that are available. An example that comes to mind, although it's not my area of expertise, is the high skills major, which offers individuals with a particular employment goal a diploma that helps to hone their skills around an employment goal in a broad job cluster or sector.

To answer your question, there is great effort to improve our K-12 results, and today I would say that we can look forward to youth down the road being in a different position from the adults of today who were in the more academic programs. We didn't serve their learning needs and their learning styles in the day that they were there.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Ms. Popovic, you mentioned that our education system is one of the strongest internationally. I find that interesting, given the 42% rate of low literacy that you mentioned. Is it still accurate to say that in education, we are still among the better nations of the world?

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: I think the data shows that we have a very high number of people completing graduate and post-graduate school on a national basis, so maybe that's a more accurate statement.

The Chair: Mr. Cardozo, do you have any comments you wish to make?

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: I would only add that this is an important issue and I think that part of it is making high school relevant to everybody. A large chunk of students graduate from high school with great marks and great literacy and lots of science and math and so forth, but a considerable number of kids are struggling. Some of them may be lower-income students, but lots of them are not and simply don't want to be in high school, so how do we make high school more relevant to them? I think there's a real awareness in school boards' understanding that they really have to serve them too. They're not there only to serve the ones who are getting As, but to serve all kids.

Part of what we've been doing is to make high school more relevant to kids and therefore more relevant to their employability.

● (0945)

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now move to Mr. Shory.

Mr. Devinder Shory: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, witnesses. I hope the sun is shining as it was when I was in beautiful British Columbia today as well.

Mr. Cardozo, I will follow up on what you were saying about the education we are providing being education aimed at places where not too many jobs exist. There are not only shortages in the high-skilled category but shortages in the low-skilled categories as well. During our study, that's what we all learned. I believe your organization has some members with requirements for low-skilled workers, and there is a shortage of them as well.

I would like you to elaborate on that. Can you tell me what kinds of services you are talking about? Are they food services or agricultural work? What are they, and how does your organization address those issues?

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: Thank you very much.

Mr. Shory, you would certainly be aware that in your province, for example, where the economy is red-hot, there is a range of shortages, both high-skilled and low-skilled. To give you an example from tourism, you have several locations across the province of Alberta where you might have a Tim Hortons that has to close at 6:00 p.m. because it can't find workers to work there, or there may be hotels that can't use all of their rooms because they don't have enough staff to work those rooms. There is a considerable shortage of people in lower-skilled areas.

I think what we're trying to do is match people up better. The temporary foreign worker program, for example, has provided some relief in that area, and certainly mobility across the country. One of the things we should be looking at, in terms of temporary foreign workers, is ensuring that lower-skilled workers can come under those programs, especially the provincial nominee program, which tends to focus on higher-skilled workers.

I don't want to suggest that we don't want to encourage everybody to have higher levels of literacy and essential skills. As my colleague was mentioning, there are really very few jobs left in which people can operate without a decent level of literacy because of everything from having to read a safety notice to having to record by computer a lot of different things that people work at. Regardless of where you are in the system, I think people need to have some basic level of literacy and computer literacy.

Mr. Devinder Shory: The way I look at the temporary foreign worker program is that it is a temporary foreign worker program. If we can find another way to find Canadians to work.... For example, we have a huge workforce available in aboriginal communities. Have any of your organizations ever considered how to encourage that workforce and get them involved in work? At the same time, is it to the benefit of the private sector to have a proactive role in not only encouraging aboriginals but in also having some sort of training or some sort of apprenticeship, etc., to encourage the workforce to improve their skills and move to the next step, or to start from the beginning and move upward?

● (0950)

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: Let me share with you two programs that two of the councils have put in place. One is the ready to work program put in place by the tourism sector council. Especially in smaller communities in northern parts of British Columbia and Alberta, there are a number of small hotels that have worked with kids from aboriginal reserves on a one-to-one basis. It's a one-to-one mentorship program, which they've called the ready to work program. They mentor a young person to integrate him or her into the workforce. In some cases, they're coming from a family situation where they haven't worked and their parents haven't worked, so there really isn't a culture of working. You might have somebody with a low level of education.

The ready to work program works on everything from training and essential literacy skills to issues around the work ethic—showing up to work on time, working with your boss, group work, and those types of things. That's one program.

Another is a woodworks program—

Mr. Devinder Shory: Mr. Cardozo, how successful is this program when there is a partnership between employees and private sector employers?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Shory. Your time is up.

Mr. Cardozo, you can reply to that, and we will give Ms. Popovic an opportunity to make a comment if she wishes. Go ahead.

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: It is successful. It's quite labour intensive, and it takes quite a while. It is a one-on-one program, so employers have to be prepared to do that one by one. The number of people who benefit from it is relatively small, but it is successful when it's done.

The other program, just to mention it quickly, is a woodworks program by the Wood Manufacturing Council. They have developed programs for, basically, grades 11 and 12 to help young people be ready to work when they come out of school. They may not be that interested in staying in high school, but they get into something that is more hands-on and more apprenticeship-oriented. It isn't quite an apprenticeship program. It's something like an early apprenticeship program. It has been used, interestingly, in a test case in a penitentiary to prepare aboriginal people before they come out of the penitentiary.

The Chair: Ms. Popovic, did you have a comment?

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: Yes. Thank you.

I want to go back a little bit to a comment my colleague made about Tim Hortons as an example and where perhaps being a cashier may generally involve what we would call lower-level literacy and essential skills.

What we are seeing now, and I think we would agree, is that with the advancements in technology we are see jobs in which there are spikes of need for essential skills. That would mean that in general, most tasks may be rather low level in terms of the needs around literacy, so an individual with lower-level skills could function there, but there are some things in that job that would require higher levels of skill. With a good learning approach at the workplace, one can actually assist a low-level learner to have that particular skill in the context of that job.

I would point to a report done not too long ago in Ontario called “Menial No More”. It looks at how low-level-skilled jobs, or what were formerly considered rather low level, have these new, more highly complex tasks that require higher levels of skill. This requirement has changed the shape of that work and has meant that training needs to become more part of the workplace itself. It's just an additional thought.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

We will now conclude with Mr. Eyking. If you wish, you can go ahead with some questions.

Hon. Mark Eyking: Thank you, Chair. It's an honour to be on this committee.

I'm going to follow up a little bit on Mr. Shory's questions on the aboriginal community. In my riding in Cape Breton, the fastest-growing community I have is the Eskasoni. They're the largest aboriginal community in Atlantic Canada.

One of our main economic drivers in Cape Breton is the work that is in Fort McMurray and places like that.

I see the Eskasoni as just an example of many aboriginal communities. Most of the time they're in remote areas. There's a disconnect with the real economy and what's happening, and they don't have a sense of what opportunities are there.

This morning in *The Globe and Mail* there's an article that says "Native leaders reject Ottawa's education overhaul". It seems that the federal government, which is responsible for the education of aboriginals, is not on the same page as the native leaders.

That said, I see the German model. I don't know if you are familiar with the German model with apprentices, with people in many of the skills in industry, but the German education system reaches to a younger age, like a junior high level, finds out what the kids are interested in, shows them different avenues that they can go in, and helps them all the way through that path. It's not as though they wait until grade 12 in Germany and then ask what they want to do; they reach younger people and show them a bit of a framework where they can go and apply.

I think the German model in the aboriginal community should be used more. You'd be going right to younger people and showing them the opportunities, showing them the jobs that are out there in the future and what they could be doing.

I really believe the unions, the private sector, and government have a role in this regard. It's a vested interest, because these are the fastest-growing communities in Canada and they have the highest unemployment. These kids are very capable, but they're not given a pathway to achieve that goal.

I would like to get your comments on what we're doing wrong. I know you gave a few examples, but that's not really what I was hoping for, a few examples. I think the article in *The Globe and Mail* is saying that this has failed. From the federal government's perspective, there has to be a better model overall for these native communities. I will leave it at that.

● (0955)

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: I think the issue of aboriginal engagement in education is an increasingly urgent one, in part because it is the fastest-growing demographic in Canada: about 50% of the aboriginal population is under the age of 25. The other interesting thing is that about half the aboriginal population lives in urban centres, so there are issues you referred to, Mr. Eyking, that are relevant to on-reserve residents and then there are other kinds of issues that are relevant to the urban aboriginal population.

I think there are a few different things that we need to be thinking about. I agree with your approach in terms of looking at the German model for apprenticeship across the board. Part of the culture change that I think would be very useful in Canada is that we seriously undervalue the apprenticeships or the trades in general, so in high school kids are basically encouraged to go to university. That's the number one thing that all kids are pushed to. In fact, we all do that in our families, or at least most of us do that, unfortunately. Then the message in high school is that if you're not good enough for university, well, you could go to college, and if you're really not good enough for that, then there are the trades.

That's quite unfortunate, because quite often when you look at it 10 years later, the kids who went through apprenticeships are doing very well, while some of those who got a B.A. in political science are floundering and not able to find a job. We have it backwards when we think a university education is the guarantee to a job and comfort for life. I think we need to look at that part of a change in our culture and provide more value to the trades and to apprenticeships.

If I can come back to the aboriginal population, I can't say that I've seen a program—and I'm not an expert on it—that is really successful enough with on-reserve aboriginal kids. It's a bit easier in the urban centres, where you have a more well-developed educational system and more supports in that system. I think provinces like Manitoba and Saskatchewan, which are projecting that in the next few years half of the population in some cities will be aboriginal, are much more seized with it and further advanced on this issue than are other provinces.

Hon. Mark Eyking: But that's not going to happen with most of the reserves. These remote areas are not coming to town to get educated. We have to assume that these kids are going to be in these areas. We have to go to them; they can't come to us. That's my sense.

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: Exactly, yes. I think the solution—

● (1000)

The Chair: Excuse me. Thank you, Mr. Eyking, your time is up.

We will have Mr. Cardozo complete his response, and then if Ms. Popovic wishes to make a remark, we are open to that as well.

Go ahead, Mr. Cardozo.

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: I think for the on-reserve young people it really comes down to some one-on-one planning. Certainly my observations across the board are that when we're dealing with turning things around in terms of aboriginal education, it's the one-on-one mentorships, the one-on-one help with kids in school that help. I think we can learn some of the lessons from Manitoba and Saskatchewan that would apply on reserve. Clearly, over the decades we haven't done a good enough job and there's more work to do, but I do think it comes down to dealing with kids on a very individual basis.

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: I concur. I have seen programming occur in aboriginal populations that needs to be within the context of the community. It needs to be something that is embraced by the community and not seen as imposed by an external interest or an external need. I have seen programming for the continued availability of individuals who are doing the teaching and the training for other types of support and acting as mentors around other personal, emotional, and family needs.There is a different kind of approach. That one-to-one approach, I agree, is very, very important.

Mr. Andrew Cardozo: Can I just mention quickly two of the programs that come to mind that are useful? One was done by the sector council that deals with automotive repair. They took their automotive repair high school program and customized it to automotive repair in terms of Ski-Doos. They ran the program on a reserve, I believe, in northern Manitoba and northern Ontario. That was very useful, because the program was very relevant to those kids. There may not be a lot of automobiles, but they certainly know about Ski-Doos. That's one example.

There's the woodworks program as well. They've again made it relevant to building housing, for example, or to some of the services around housing. When you take a program that's apprenticeship-oriented or trades-oriented and make it relevant to the reserves, I think it has a much greater chance of being successful.

Ms. Aleksandra Popovic: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Thank you for that, Mr. Cardozo and Ms. Popovic. We certainly appreciate your appearing and taking the time to give us all the information at your disposal with respect to this study.

We're going to suspend—

Mr. Ryan Cleary: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We're going to suspend our hearing and move in camera. You can leave us, as we have other business to do, but before I suspend I want to deal with a point of order.

Thank you very much. We'll just wait until you're disconnected.

All right, I think we're in committee. You had a point of order, Mr. Cleary. Go ahead.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My point of order has to do with the notice of motion that I sent to all members of this committee. We confirmed that it was received on October 2. The notice of motion was:

> That the committee immediately strike a subcommittee to study the following: "Changes to Employment Insurance: The Impact on Canadian Workers, Industries and Communities";
>
> That this study focus on the impact on changes to the employment insurance program that were announced last spring, and in particular the end of the Extra Five Weeks pilot project and the changes to the Working While on Claim pilot project—

Ms. Kellie Leitch: I have a point of order. This isn't a point of order—

Mr. Ryan Cleary: —the study should focus on the impact on seasonal workers and industries—

The Chair: Mr. Cleary, hold on.

Go ahead, Ms. Leitch.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: This is not a point of order. A point of order must be raised with regard to the relevance of the material that we're speaking to on our specific committee. This is about putting forward a separate issue.

I ask the chair to rule with respect to that and then I will respectfully ask that the chair place us in camera. I put that forward as a motion.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: I haven't got to my point of order yet, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Just a moment. Hold on. Hold on.

There will be no debate on the point of order. You should raise your point of order, but your point of order shouldn't get into debate about the motion you filed.

Let me just set out some parameters. I think it's appropriate for you to raise your notice of motion and speak with respect to it. Our time for this particular portion of the meeting has expired, since we were to go from 8:45 to 9:45 and we're past that time and have concluded. Now, if your point is whether you can move your motion, you can, but—

● (1005)

Mr. Ryan Cleary: You didn't let me finish—

The Chair: Let me finish—

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Are you challenging the chair?

The Chair: Now, just a moment. Let me finish.

The point is that you're entitled to do that, but the time has run out. I've indicated I would suspend this meeting to move to our agenda item, which is consideration of the draft report. If you want to deal with it within that context, you can; if you want to deal with it at the next meeting, you can do that. However, we're not going to debate your motion here.

Therefore, if your point of order is that you want to debate it at this session, I won't allow that, but you can in the next session, if you wish, or you could deal with it when we move in camera to deal with draft instructions, although that's not the point of our business. You can do it then or you can do it subsequently, but you won't do it here and now.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: I appreciate that, Mr. Chair.

My point of order is not to debate the motion. My point of order was first to make sure everybody's on the same page on the fact that I introduced this notice of motion. My point of order is that if we had confirmation that everybody received this notice of motion on October 2, why isn't this notice of motion—this is my point of order—on the agenda for today's meeting?

The Chair: Look, until you raised the fact that you wanted to present your motion on the agenda, and I would usually allow for time before we conclude our agenda items for you to deal with it.

It was not brought to my attention that you wish to deal with it today. It would be inappropriate for you to deal with it today, but you can at the next meeting, or you can take some other course of action.

I'm going to suspend, because I don't think that's an appropriate point of order.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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