



Labour's vision for government support

Learning at work: it's our right • L'apprentissage au travail : c'est notre droit

Sustainable funding for a comprehensive strategy

Governments must make a commitment to literacy and essential skills as a priority within a well-funded, pan-Canadian training strategy. Such a strategy must include objectives for equity and access to learning in all provinces and territories. The strategy needs to take a broad approach by viewing literacy as a systemic rather than an individual issue to be addressed. Literacy must be integrated in pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship and skills training.

The Right to Learn must be mandated in our laws including:

- a well-funded public education system providing free literacy and essential skills upgrading for adults
- a training levy to ensure all employers participate in workplace programs
- mandated training included in the Canada Labour Code and Employment Standards
- an entitlement to training leave through Employment Insurance

Key aspects of a training strategy:

- provincial and territorial funding for infrastructure, coordination and delivery of literacy programs in the workplace
- Labour Market Partners Forums including employers and labour as key stakeholders at the federal, provincial and territorial levels
- a continuing role for the federal government

Provincial and territorial support for workplace literacy

Provincial priorities in the new Labour Market Agreements (LMA) include employed workers with low literacy skills. Labour is advocating for provincial and territorial funding for workplace-based literacy programs as part of this LMA commitment.

Workers with low literacy skills include people who have some difficulty with reading, writing and numeracy. They may be immigrants whose first language is neither English nor French. Those with low literacy skills may be young adults. They may be people who have not had the chance to complete Grade 12. They may be high school or college graduates whose literacy skills have become weaker over time.



While labour urges and bargains for employer funding for literacy and training, our experience shows that government support is also crucial. In fact, provincial government dollars spent strategically have a proven capacity to lever significant employer investment in workplace learning. Funding models need to extend beyond corporate tax credits.

A provincial strategy is needed, together with public sector support for infrastructure and delivery.

Strategy

- require employer funding of training including literacy
- include indicators that reflect support for a systemic, holistic approach to literacy rather than an individual approach
- ensure English or French as a second or additional language is included under the umbrella of literacy programs
- integrate literacy in pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship and skills training, particularly for workers in vulnerable industries

- include equity measures to ensure all workers get regular access to training
- require joint business and labour, or tripartite structures with government, to oversee funding and programs and ensure accountability at all levels of a literacy strategy
- ensure that labour is a full and equal partner in the development process and implementation of a literacy strategy
- require joint labour-management decision-making structures at the workplace

Infrastructure

- funding for labour to support, develop partnerships, coordinate and deliver programs (central labour bodies or unions)
- funding and support for needs assessment
- funding and support for instructors, including paid preparation time, good salaries and working conditions

- funding and support for literacy organizations and networks

Workplace program delivery: core elements

- joint labour-management workplace committee
- voluntary participation with confidentiality assured
- paid time (full or partial) for participation in programs
- content based on workers' needs, addressing the needs of the whole person
- accountability using individual and collective assessment and evaluation rather than learner testing

Several provinces provide financial support for workplace literacy. They feature business-labour-government partnerships.

- The Manitoba government program Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills includes the costs of an instructor and preparation time. Workplace-based programs are run by a project committee that includes labour. Manitoba's Workplace Education Steering Committee, coordinated by the provincial government, has labour representation.
- The Nova Scotia government program Workplace Education is available to businesses and labour organizations across the province. Coordinators assess learning needs, recommend programs, and help workplace teams select instructors. Labour is a full member of the Nova Scotia Partners for Workplace Education Committee. This multi-stakeholder committee advises the Department of Labour and Workforce Development on its Workplace Education program, including approving funding for workplace programs.
- Workplace Education P.E.I. coordinators approach employers, assist in organizational needs assessments, support instructors, and access funding for the workplace programs.
- In Quebec, funding is available for the development and recognition of skills, the adaptation of material for persons with disabilities, practitioner training, and setting up joint labour-management committees. All of the labour market partners are involved with supporting workplace literacy activities through the Labour Market Partners' Commission. Its responsibility includes allocating funds collected under Quebec's *Act to foster the development of manpower training*.

Labour Market Partners' Forums

Literacy is one part of the broad range of labour market training. Government alone cannot adequately respond to the needs in this area. A partners' forum is needed to give voice to the concerns and interests of labour and employers. Labour must be an equal partner with employers. The views of the public and voluntary sectors involved with service delivery and advocacy must also be heard.

Labour Market Partners' Forums should be permanent advisory bodies at the federal as well as provincial and territorial levels. Their role should be to:

- advise on education and training strategies to enhance literacy, skills development, and labour adjustment strategies for laid-off workers
- make recommendations on various options for funding workplace-based strategies for upgrading, literacy, language training, basic computer skills, high school completion and other life-long educational initiatives
- include a focus on infrastructure, funding, quality models and programs, labour market research, equity and access

Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador have had successful partners' forums for several years. Newfoundland and Labrador's Strategic Partnership Initiative is a collaboration of business, labour, and government on economic challenges facing the province. A tripartite Labour Market Committee includes the Deputy Ministers of the relevant government ministries, as well as representatives of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of Labour and the Newfoundland and Labrador Business Caucus.

Quebec's Labour Market Partners Commission is a province-wide consultative body composed of representatives of employers, unions, public education, community groups, as well as government observers. The Commission plays a critical role in the application of Quebec's *Act to foster the development of manpower training* and establishes funding criteria for the National Labour Force Training Fund.

A continuing federal role

Although the federal government has been shifting much responsibility and funding for training to the provinces, it still has an important role to:

- develop a pan-Canadian training strategy with guaranteed standards and principles
- require Labour Market Partners Forums as part of the Labour Market Agreements
- provide and transfer additional funds to provinces and territories
- ensure equitable access
- amend the Canada Labour Code to mandate training leave and joint training committees

Though its role may be diminished, the federal government has a continuing direct role in literacy:

- with employers under federal jurisdiction
- with Canadians in areas of federal responsibility: immigrants, Aboriginal Peoples and francophones outside Quebec (under the *Official Languages Act*)
- through departments and programs such as the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources and Skills Development
- through funding for sector councils and other organizations