

LEARNING TO WIN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *BC Progress Board* established a Panel on *Education, Skills, Training and Technology Transfer* (ESTTT) for the purpose of assessing BC's learning systems. The Panel's work is based on two key premises. First, our prospects for prosperity, present and future, are directly linked to our society's basic, overall capacity for learning and innovation. Second, BC must build upon its current education strengths and create a culture of ongoing learning in order to secure its economic and social future.

British Columbia has been the subject of dramatic demographic, economic and social change in the last 30 years, and this pattern shows no sign of slowing in the next 30 years. Demographic shifts mean that the number of BC retirees will begin to outnumber new labour force entrants by 2009, increasing our reliance on immigration. Competition for skilled workers will be a national and international reality, and BC will have to focus more attention on growing an educated workforce within the province.

The economy is changing rapidly. Substantially increased international competition results in continuous pressure to enhance productivity, to reduce production costs and to innovate. These factors, combined with the growth of a knowledge-based economy, mean labour market needs are continually changing. Today's jobs require higher levels of education than ever before, while generating new opportunities requires more investment in research and development to drive innovation.

BC has a solid education foundation to build on. The province's kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) and post-secondary systems are of high quality, posting strong and consistent overall performance. But improving the system will require addressing some key challenges. At the K-12 level these are three-fold. First, steps should be taken to address performance and completion gaps that exist between Aboriginal students and the general student population. Second, the disparity in performance levels and completion rates across the province and between rural and urban districts should be addressed. And third, more emphasis should also be placed on enrolment in career, co-op and apprenticeship programs in the secondary system.

At the post-secondary level BC boasts a diversified education system, made up of a network of colleges, universities, university-colleges and specialized institutions — both public and private. However, enrolment pressures are increasing as a large high school age cohort begins to graduate. And, the changing needs of the economy are serving to increase the demand for post-secondary education of all forms. As entrance requirements are driven higher and qualified students are turned away, BC is beginning to experience shortages in a number of key professional disciplines, technical occupations, and skilled trades. This situation demands special attention in all regions, but especially where population growth pressures are predicted to be the heaviest (Lower Mainland/Fraser Valley and the Okanagan).

Succeeding in today's knowledge-based economy also requires a firm provincial commitment to research and development and innovation. While the Federal government is making increased resources available for such initiatives, BC is lagging behind other provinces in accessing and leveraging such funds. And, BC industry-level investment in research and development is below the national average. While this can be attributed — at least in part — to an under-performing provincial economy in recent years, public policy has also played a role in deterring industrial research and development in some sectors.

The Panel has devised a "Learning to Win" strategy that requires a fundamental commitment from all stakeholders (individuals, communities, businesses and governments) that extends across the learning spectrum from early childhood development to life-long learning. This approach includes removing barriers to individual access to learning across the province through an integrated three stage learning process. First, this involves "Getting Ready" by ensuring that parents of pre-school children are provided information on the importance of early childhood development. Second, "Getting Set" underscores the need to increase secondary school per-

formance levels, graduation rates, and "multiple pathways" towards secondary and post-secondary graduation. The third and final stage of this process is "Go", and involves enhanced support for research and innovation, along with a system-wide commitment to life-long learning. The report includes ten strategic recommendations:

1. Require health and education agencies to make available to all new and prospective parents, the facts linking secure, nurturing, and stimulating home/family environments to strong brain development, high capacity for learning, and low incidence of behaviour disorder and incorporate within the educational curriculums for all high school students programs on parenting and early childhood development.
2. Develop a core emphasis on student performance assessment in kindergarten through grade 10, with a focus on expanded and refined knowledge of student assessment criteria and methodology; set targets for performance on international achievement tests (reading, math and science) approaching a score of 550.
3. Engage with Aboriginal communities in a culture of learning that encourages students to succeed in their educational goals and monitor year over year improvements in student performance on Foundation Skills Assessments and in relation to graduation rates.
4. Broaden and extend pathways to graduation and target an increase in the overall secondary program graduation rate at a minimum of 85% by 2010, and increase the rate of secondary program graduation for Aboriginal students to 60% or better by 2010.
5. Within the increase of the overall secondary program graduation rate, target increases in the number of students completing programs in apprenticeship, career/technical, and cooperative education by a minimum of 50% by 2010.
6. Expand the capacity of the post-secondary system to respond to a growing student population and demand:
 - o Extend the mandate of an existing provincial University to Kelowna;
 - o The numbers of international students educated within our post-secondary system should be increased by 50% by 2010;
 - o Consideration should be given to the potential benefits of rationalizing college administration, beginning with the Greater Vancouver area; and,
 - o Increase the overall profile and capacity of skilled trades and technical training by reallocating existing research and capital infrastructure of BCIT to Kelowna and Prince George.
7. Sponsor a Learning Summit every two years focusing on the development of partnerships between industry, communities, and educational institutions to foster workforce education and lifelong learning experiences for all British Columbians.
8. Replenish the BC Knowledge Development Fund sufficiently to ensure that BC attracts a minimum 15-20 % share of all federal research funding for British Columbia.
9. Increase the number of students completing graduate research degrees within our university system by 7.5% annually.
10. Set appropriate targets for technology transfer and the commercialization of technologies arising from university research, including the number of patents, licenses and spin-off companies that should be developed.