

George Brown College
Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance 2012-2013 Pre-Budget
Consultations, August 2011

George Brown College, located on three campuses in downtown Toronto, is one of Canada's largest and most diverse public colleges, serving over 24,000 full-time students and close to 70,000 continuing studies students. The college offers 158 programs and has established areas of excellence in fields such as culinary arts, hospitality, early childhood education, nursing, construction, theatre arts, information technology, mechanical engineering, business, and design. Since its opening in 1967, George Brown College has been a leader in understanding the nature of the evolving workplace and educating its students to enter the workforce with the skills and the knowledge to succeed. The college has specialized programs and services that bring marginalized or undereducated people into the workforce. Because of the college's location in centre of Canada's most diverse city, it has a special mandate to serve Toronto's large immigrant population and offers programming specifically tailored to the needs of new Canadians. George Brown College also plays a vital role in Applied Research activities and works with hundreds of industry partners on a variety of projects.

It is from our perspective as a leader in both preparing and retraining people for the labour force and as a centre for applied research and innovation, that George Brown College makes the following recommendations for the 2012 Federal budget that are specifically related to the two issues of **how to achieve a sustained economic recovery in Canada and how to create quality sustainable jobs**.

In order for Canada to continue to achieve the level of economic stability and prosperity that has helped the country weather the economic storm that has battered the world economy over the past few years, we must continue to place a high priority on education and training. Canada's best bet for sustained economic recovery and quality sustainable jobs is **investment in people**. Canada must focus on integrating all Canadians into the labour force. We cannot afford to leave anyone on the sidelines and all Canadians must be able to participate to the best of their abilities in the labour force. To this end, we make three recommendations to the Federal Standing Committee on Finance:

1. The Government of Canada work to leverage the talents and skills of new Canadians and facilitate the successful integration of skilled immigrants into the Canadian economy through the expansion of existing overseas pre-arrival services to immigrants, and through the expansion of services available to international students at colleges to facilitate their ability to become permanent residents.
2. Improve outreach, transition and retention programs for traditionally under-represented groups including urban Aboriginal youth, social assistance recipients and people with disabilities, through comprehensive vocationally-oriented education programs with modified instructional delivery and strategic student supports that are effective in bringing marginalized people into the workforce. A key first step to achieving this goal is to strike a **Pan-Canadian Task Force on Access to Post Secondary Education for Under-Represented Groups**. This task force would be given the mandate to assess the effectiveness of Outreach, Transition and Retention strategies in use across Canada, identify best practices, areas for further research and facilitate the adoption and expansion of best practices across the country through targeted funding and policy support.

3. The Government of Canada, in partnership with provincial and territorial governments introduce phase two of the Knowledge Infrastructure Program. This fund should be available for capital needs at public colleges for educational infrastructure directly related to a demonstrable labour market need.

Leverage the Talents and Skills of New Canadians

Canadian colleges provide a bridge to the Canadian workplace for Internationally Trained Immigrants (ITIs), through a variety of targeted programs and are also welcoming more international students than ever before. George Brown's internal research shows that almost half of international students wish to remain permanently in Canada, and our research also shows that half of the international students studying at the college already have some postsecondary education. However, providing recognition of internationally acquired credentials and workplace experience for both immigrants and international students remains a complicated process which serves as an effective barrier to the speedy integration of newcomers into the Canadian economy.

Canada's lack of pre-arrival information on foreign credential recognition (FCR) subjects potential migrants to the complex task of navigating a system of local and institution-specific requirements, usually only after they've arrived in Canada. At the heart of this is the lack of a national governing body for FCR in Canada. The system creates delays for newcomers in obtaining employment and entrance to educational institutions, leading to the need to take "survival" jobs rather than employment in their area of professional training. The current situation causes negative economic consequences for both the immigrant or international student and Canadian society.

The Australian government has initiated a system to assess foreign credentials before the immigrant leaves their home country and we support a similar model. Success in integrating skilled immigrants in Australia is generally attributed to extensive pre-arrival screening and selection, coupled with the availability of comprehensive pre-arrival foreign credential recognition services. The creation of the National Policy of Internal Mutual Recognition facilitates recognition of credentials across jurisdictions, while the national Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) has standardized qualifications across institutions and regions in Australia. Both are designed to enhance labour mobility and facilitate the recognition of foreign credentials. The Australian government also provides a range of pre-arrival settlement services to potential migrants in high immigration countries

A similar system of pre-arrival services could be initiated by the Canadian government through an existing federally funded program – the Canadian Immigration Integration Project (CIIP).ⁱ The program has been providing pre-arrival information to help skilled workers prepare for labour market integration into Canada since 2005. CIIP overseas offices are located in three high volume immigration countries (China, India, Philippines), along with the 2011 addition of an office in the United Kingdom. CIIP provides labour market information and assistance with education and employment planning to potential migrants.

We recommend that the existing infrastructure of CIIP be scaled up to include comprehensive credential assessment, and pre-entry language and employment training opportunities through existing connections between colleges and local academic institutional partners. Providing FCR services and pre-arrival training opportunities to skilled immigrants before they arrive in Canada will facilitate faster integration into either more highly skilled jobs or the Canadian education system once they arrive.

International Students

In the last 10 years, Canada has seen 170% growth in international student enrolments at the post-secondary level, with the majority studying in Ontario (36%)ⁱⁱ. The Ontario government recently announced plans to increase international student enrolment by 50% over the next five years.

In a survey of international students conducted by GBC in 2011, it was found 49% held a previous post-secondary credential and another 17% had some post-secondary education, indicating a clear need for adequate credential assessment services. International students in Ontario are a unique and increasingly large group of students for which the existing systems and pathways do not allow for appropriate recognition of the skills and education already obtained abroad.

International students represent a highly desirable source of educated, skilled immigrants who have experienced significant Canadian acculturation. Many already have workplace experience and could make a significant contribution to Canada's economic future. However, current international student advising services available at Canadian educational institutions are inadequate to deal with the needs of international students seeking to become permanent residents. Our internal research indicates that less than half have a clear understanding of Canadian immigration policies for pathways to immigration.

Recommendation:

The Government of Canada work to facilitate the successful integration of desirable groups of potential immigrants into the Canadian economy through the expansion of existing overseas pre-arrival services to immigrants, and through the expansion of services available to international students at colleges to facilitate their ability to become permanent residents.

Improve Outreach, Transition and Retention in Post-Secondary Education for Traditionally Underrepresented Student Groups

People who are socially and economically marginalized often have few marketable skills and rely on various forms of social assistance as they have few employment prospects apart from precarious employment. Some hesitate to take short-term jobs for fear of being without income and having difficulty reinstituting social assistance when the job ends. Most have no clear career path with related skills and industry-recognized credentials. However, when people can participate in education and training that includes a variety of supports tailored to their specific needs, about 2/3 of them are successful at finding and sustaining competitive employmentⁱⁱⁱ. This is good for the economy and is beneficial for society overall, as well as benefitting the individual graduates and their families. While the support required for these programs results in a higher delivery cost than that of typical college programs, it is well worth the investment.

George Brown College has experienced significant success with the programs that we have developed for marginalized students. Two particularly successful programs are:

Augmented education: These students have a history of significant mental illness and/or addictions and almost all are on social benefits or unemployed before entering the program. Some also have unstable housing or are homeless. About two-thirds of those who complete the assistant cook or construction program attain employment after graduation and about half are still employed at 6-month follow-up. Some go on to further training before pursuing employment.

Women Transitioning to Trades: Students are referred by social service agencies based on the woman having experienced or being at high risk of experiencing violence. A comprehensive, high support program provides preparation for and transition to specific trade training (e.g., HVAC, appliance repair), as well as addressing collateral needs that are essential for student success. In the first cohort, at one-year follow-up 77% of students were employed, one was self-employed, and two others were in further training. In the current cohort, who are just completing their training, 10 students out of 25 are already have related employment, 9 of them full-time.

Aboriginal Students

In addition to increasing the capacity of Canada's colleges to meet the educational needs of traditionally marginalized students and prepare them to join the labour force, special attention must be paid to the needs of aboriginal students, and, in particular, urban aboriginal students.

Aboriginal students' success is increased by culturally appropriate student services, inclusion of Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum, and direct financial support. Over the next decade, 400,000 Aboriginal young people will reach working age.^{iv} Canada must ensure that these young people are well prepared to enter the workforce. However, colleges have a limited capacity to provide the necessary supports to Aboriginal students due to lack of funding designated for this purpose.

Aboriginal students seek clear indicators that a college is welcoming and supportive. They are most interested in receiving culturally appropriate supports as they pursue mainstream programs leading to standard workplace-recognized credentials, rather than enrolling in Aboriginal-specific programs. This is particularly true in urban areas. The presence of an Elder, Aboriginal counselling staff, a dedicated space for gathering and study, and strong connections between the college and the community all support success for Aboriginal students.

Outreach, Transition and Retention

While some of the groups mentioned above require a very high level of support in order to successfully transition to post-secondary education and then to the work force, there is also a large group of potential students who, with modest outreach, transition and retention efforts, could be very successful in college programs and be integrated into the labour force. In Toronto alone, approximately 35,000 of Ontario Works recipients are between the ages of 18-29, don't have high school diplomas and have non-existent or spotty work histories.^v This represents an enormous pool of potential that our economy is not tapping into as well as a significant cost to government in terms of lost revenue from income taxes and the cost of social assistance. We suggest making an investment in this group of people that will result in a positive net return. We know that with even modest programs supports, students from marginalized backgrounds can be successful in post-secondary education and in transitioning to the workforce.

Recommendation:

Improve access to college education for traditionally under-represented groups including urban Aboriginal youth, social assistance recipients and the disabled, through comprehensive vocationally-oriented education programs with modified instructional delivery and strategic student supports that are effective in bringing marginalized people into the workforce.

A key first step to achieving this goal is to strike a **Pan-Canadian Task Force on Access to Post Secondary Education for Under-Represented Groups**. This task force would be given the mandate to assess the

effectiveness of Outreach, Transition and Retention strategies in use across Canada, identify best practices, areas for further research and facilitate the adoption and expansion of best practices across the country through targeted funding and policy support.

The Knowledge Infrastructure Program

We believe that expanding the ability of Canada's public colleges to meet the demand for advanced skills by increasing the capacity of colleges to train students is crucial to a sustained economic recovery and to the creation of quality, sustainable jobs. However, many colleges cannot meet this demand due to a lack of physical space to accommodate additional students.

The 2009 Knowledge Infrastructure Program (KIP) was welcomed by George Brown College and allowed us to build our new Health Sciences Campus on Toronto's Waterfront. This project will allow our college to provide 3,500 students with health science related programs. The demand for health care workers is very strong and will continue to grow as our population ages and people live longer. There is no doubt that KIP was a highly successful and well conceived program that allowed us to build capacity in a critical area. The targeted funding that George Brown College received from KIP to build an educational facility tied directly to labour force demand is the type of "smart" investment that should continue.

The Conference Board of Canada estimates that Ontario will face a shortage of close to 200,000 workers in the next decade. Over the next 30 years, Toronto's population is projected to soar, triggering new residential, institutional and infrastructure construction. During this same period, thousands of experienced workers will be lost to retirement. In the next 5 years alone an estimated 50,000 construction workers will be needed to replace retirees. This number is in addition to the 35,000 workers required to satisfy natural growth in the sector.

The labour shortages in the construction sector are well known and over the past decade, much effort has been put into promoting the skilled trades as a valuable, secure and well paid career option. The evidence of the success of this promotional campaign is the dramatic increase in the number of applicants to Skilled Trades programs, including Apprenticeship. However, physical capacity to meet the demand has not grown at the same pace. For example, in 2010, George Brown College's Centre for Construction and Engineering Trades received over 7000 applications for 1200 spots. While we are greatly encouraged by the interest in our programs, we had to turn away close to 6000 applicants due to lack of space.

Canada must continue to invest in the education and training of its citizens and ensure that funding for educational infrastructure is targeted and strategic.

Recommendation:

The Government of Canada, in partnership with provincial and territorial governments introduce phase two of the Knowledge Infrastructure Program. This fund should be available for capital needs for educational infrastructure directly related to a demonstrable labour market need.

ⁱ <http://www.newcomersuccess.ca/index.php/en/about-ciip>

ⁱⁱ Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011

ⁱⁱⁱ George Brown College Internal Research on Augmented Education and Women Transitioning to Trades programs, 2011

^{iv} *Federal Framework for Aboriginal Economic Development*. Government of Canada, 2009.

^v Toronto Employment and Social Services, 2011