

Speaking Notes

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

[Canadian Council for Career Development \(3CD\)](#)

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I represent the Canadian Council for Career Development, a voluntary coalition of leaders in career development from all provinces who help Canadians of all ages to navigate learning and work successfully. We all know that the best routes to combat poverty are through education and work but accessing both has become increasingly difficult.

First the context. Canada rates first among industrialized countries on the proportion of residents with university or college degrees or diplomas. We also have the highest rates of PSE degree holders working in jobs where they earn half or below half of the median income, the commonly accepted cut off point for poverty. Indigenous and immigrant youth face even greater challenges as do youth with disabilities and youth already living in poverty. There is some evidence that many youth are questioning the value of PSE—which is very dangerous indeed.

A SunLife study (2012) found that 86% of 18-24 year olds report excessive stress attributed to underemployment and/or employment prospects. The direct links between stress and mental illness are indisputable. In its 2014 report, the Canadian chamber of commerce stated that “improving the pathways for youth from education to employment is one of national importance if not a national emergency.”

There is ample research which demonstrates that career education and support services and workplace learning opportunities produce positive education and labour market outcomes, not of course in isolation but they are key components and they are, in Canada, traditionally underused as accessible and affordable labour market and poverty reduction strategies. I do not have time to draw your

attention to examples but will be very pleased to provide references for your review.

There are also major challenges. Access to career services, especially for those in transition between school and work or between work and work, are not consistent or coordinated. Career pathways for youth are fragmented and there are huge gaps in collaboration between stakeholders, primarily educational institutions and the business community. Entry standards, pathways to employment, areas of skill shortage are very unclear. Entry level jobs are less frequently a first step and more commonly a dead end, offering precarious work and low pay. A review done by McLean's in 2014 reviewed job advertisements in the "entry level" sections of three major Canadian career websites showing that even for these jobs, employers demand two to five years of work experience. Work experience is hard to come by.

And everyone blames everyone else. The employer community blames educators for not producing the graduates it needs; educators blame the business community for not providing opportunity, inflating job qualifications and lack of clarity on pathways; career services are blamed for using outdated tools such as the horror stories you have all heard about the computer program spitting out that you should be an undertaker and of course everyone blames governments. This blame game is not getting us far.

How to move forward and how can leadership from the career development community support? I turn to this now.

Number 1 and it is a big one. We need a National School to Work Transitions Framework and Strategy that is built on a solid foundation of what has worked in other countries and what is being done in pockets of excellence across Canada. We have no mechanism to bring the critical partners together in order to build that foundation on what has already been done and is known to be working. Critical partners need to include educators, employers, career development leaders, social service agencies, the mental health system, provincial and territorial governments. Such a strategy will not be built overnight but it can be built strategically and systematically and cooperatively, moving us out of the

blame game toward a strategic planning game. Bringing the critical stakeholders together is something the federal government can do without tripping over jurisdictional boundaries; it has been done before, by our community and others. There are pockets of excellence here and internationally that can be built upon and shaped collectively. This is likely a 5 year strategy but a most worthwhile one and certainly one which could begin to build optimism for the future among youth and marginalized groups and at the same time tackle some major contributors to poverty.

Number 2: The second burning issue we want to raise with you is the importance for youth to have opportunities for workplace learning. Access to work experience or co-op programs at both secondary and post-secondary levels is very limited as is access to paid internships. Even volunteer organizations are asking for previous volunteer experience.

Researchers in career development studied access to workplace learning across Canada and uncovered consistent trends. We have good programs at all levels but access to them is very limited. The problems are with implementation and sustained funding, not with good programs.

We also have very few incentive programs to encourage employers to hire young graduates and to provide some on the job training to help them be successful. We need a way to bring the business community forward, hear their challenges and what would be needed in order for them to be able to open more opportunities for youth, both disadvantaged and not. And we need to begin to work to address some of those barriers

We would also like to recommend consideration for programs modelled after successful initiatives such as Katimavik, Youth Service Canada or new spin-offs to provide young people with practical work experience that also benefits their communities. Such work experience could be part of a demand focused strategy, providing experience in areas of potential future growth and opportunity. An idea to consider would be some form of debt forgiveness—for example one year of tuition forgiven after six months or one year of volunteering in a community based work experience program that pays minimum wage. We are convinced

there would be enormous long term cost savings in moving this kind of initiative forward.

These two initiatives, creating the mechanisms for developing a National School to Work Transitions Strategy and building work experience opportunities in demand sectors of the economy, if undertaken in the collaborative spirit I have tried to describe could go a long way to mitigating against what the Chamber of Commerce termed a pending national emergency. That may be a slight overstatement but it is not far off the mark. We cannot have a labour market which is increasingly difficult for all Canadians to navigate, which sets up impenetrable barriers such as no job without work experience but no opportunity to get work experience, and which turns entry level jobs into permanent precarious jobs leading to increased poverty. We need to focus on making the school to work transition less fraught with dead ends. To tackle this we need to build on existing excellence, we need a framework and we need to have mechanisms to bring the critical stakeholders to the table to make it happen. The Canadian Council for Career Development will be allies in making these happen.

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