



Federal Literacy Facts

an update on literacy-related developments at the national level

Movement for Canadian Literacy

January 2002

Friends:

*Welcome to the first **Federal Literacy Facts** bulletin of 2002. Over the past year, we've used **FLF** to keep you posted on the progress of the federal government's Skills and Learning Initiative, first announced in the February 2001 Speech from the Throne. This has been an exciting focus as it has the potential to improve the opportunities for less-literate Canadians and to engage more partners (government and non-government) in helping put the necessary frameworks in place. In this issue of **FLF** you'll find:*

- a quick review of the Skills and Learning Initiative;*
- a summary of what the December 2001 federal budget had to say about Skills and Learning;*
- a "heads up" about the Green Paper on Skills and Learning we understand will be released fairly soon; and*
- an overview of the role MCL plans to play as this important policy work unfolds.*

I look forward to working with you to ensure an effective voice for the literacy community in the development of "pan-Canadian" literacy policy.

*Wendy DesBrisay
Executive Director, MCL*

The Skills and Learning Agenda

Although the government's motivation for developing a national skills and learning initiative stems from concerns about labour market competitiveness and the demands of the new economy, the Prime Minister has stated publicly that economic development and social development must be pursued together. We were told that along with more typical training issues such as the apprenticeship system, student loans, and the recognition of prior learning, the Initiative would address Aboriginal learning needs and develop a "National Literacy Strategy". The government promised to involve the provinces and territories, the private sector and voluntary organizations in developing the plans.

Over the Spring and Summer of 2001, several roundtables were held to gather the input of various stakeholders. These roundtables are discussed in earlier issues of **FLF** (online at www.literacy.ca).

The Skills and Learning Initiative lost some momentum when the government shifted its focus to national and global security after September 11. However, official and unofficial statements from the government say the change of focus is temporary and that skills and learning are still very much on the agenda. It's also a good sign that HRDC Minister Jane Stewart kept her portfolio in the recent Cabinet shuffle.

Budget 2001

Literacy advocates were disappointed but not surprised to see that last month's federal budget did not contain any provisions for the National Literacy Strategy promised earlier.

The budget did include some skills and learning measures, mainly targeted at higher levels. For example, the apprenticeship system got a boost, and there are new tax breaks for tuition for Canadians receiving EI. There are indications that the government may see community colleges and industry councils as the main framework for delivering training and adult learning. Not much in this budget applies to basic literacy learners or providers.

The good news is, the budget is not the last word on the Skills and Learning agenda.

Coming Soon: Green Paper on Skills and Learning

The federal government is expected to release a Green Paper on Skills and Learning within the next two months. In comparison to a White Paper, a Green Paper is “more suggestive than directive about initiatives, options and program ideas”.

According to government sources, there will be a variety of ways for the literacy community to have input. However, at this time there is no confirmation on what these opportunities will be, where they will take place and when, except that they are likely to take place within six months – likely before the summer break.

Don't expect the Green Paper to contain “quick fixes”. Although HRDC Minister Jane Stewart acknowledges that a strong literacy foundation is the basis of all life-long learning and skills development, she also emphasizes that developing the skills agenda is a long-term process. “You can't change everything overnight and make it perfect for lifelong learning,” she has said. Because literacy is under the jurisdiction of the provinces and territories, a national literacy strategy will require their agreement, and this is a major undertaking.

Ensuring a strong response from the Literacy Community

The Skills and Learning Agenda has potential to affect the literacy community across the country, and the Green Paper on Skills and Learning will provide an important rallying point to ensure that literacy does not drop off the bottom. MCL will be your eyes and ears in Ottawa – watching out for your interests, keeping you informed and looking for opportunities for literacy community input. In the coming weeks and months we will:

- meet with key government contacts, monitor developments on the S & L Initiative, and keep you posted;
- provide the literacy community with an initial analysis of the Green Paper's proposed policy directions and policy options, and canvass literacy stakeholders for their additional perspectives;
- produce a response to the Green Paper and distribute it to the literacy community, government, and federal politicians;
- liaise with government to ensure that literacy stakeholders are involved in the consultative process;
- inform the literacy community about opportunities for participation, and provide policy support when requested; and
- work with provincial, territorial and national literacy organizations to “build the case” and bring it forward with an effective, unified voice.

Stay tuned!

For more details about the progress of the Skills and Learning Initiative to date, check the back issues of *Federal Literacy Facts*, under publications at www.literacy.ca

If you have questions or comments about the Initiative or about MCL's role, e-mail mcl@literacy.ca or call (613) 563-2464.