Boosting Essential Skills of Low-skilled Workers

Friday, January 21, 2005 – Despite what we know about the importance of skills development to success in the knowledge economy, there are still few opportunities for low-skilled workers to improve their situation by enhancing their skills. Government training programs tend to target the unemployed, rather than the low skilled. Employers often prefer to spend their training dollars on workers who are already highly skilled.

A new report from CPRN examines some Canadian initiatives designed to promote skills upgrading for less-skilled workers to uncover the conditions that contribute to success in such endeavours. ***Skills Upgrading Initiatives in Canada: Regional Case Studies***, by Richard Brisbois, Researcher, and Ron Saunders, Director, of CPRN's Work Network, presents some innovative case studies from two Canadian jurisdictions – diamond mines in the Northwest Territories and oil sands and trucking companies in Alberta. Most of them involve special efforts to meet the needs of Aboriginal workers.

Brisbois and Saunders find collaboration between governments, employers and educational institutions has been a major key to success. Other factors include; significant private investment by the companies concerned; assessment tools and training customized to fit the needs of employers and the skill gaps of employees; a readiness by companies to provide paid time for training; appropriate, sensitive learning environments; learning materials directly related to employees' jobs; marketing of upgrading programs to both senior management and employees; community capacity building; appropriate regulation by governments, and; skilled adult educators.

While anecdotal evidence from the case studies points to improvements in employee skill levels, productivity and self-esteem, the authors advocate greater effort to track such initiatives across the country and measure outcomes. They also suggest that their case studies do not address the situation of small and medium-sized enterprises where the substantial costs of delivering training may pose an unaffordable challenge.

This is a preliminary report prepared for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as part of the Study on Skills Upgrading for the Low-qualified, led by the LEED Directing Committee of the OECD. A revised version will appear in a forthcoming OECD publication, *Rising Expectations: New Perspectives for the Low-Skilled*, OECD, Paris, 2005.

To access or download a copy of this CPRN report click here.

e-network e-network work e-network e-net