

**HEADLINE:** Round Table on Creating a More Efficient Labour Market in Canada Hosted by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards: First Session - Improving the Effectiveness of Sector Councils

**PRINCIPAL:** Margaret Biggs, Assistant Deputy Minister, Nationally Delivered Programs, Human Resource Development Canada

**Moderator:** Merci beaucoup Jean. Our final lead speaker is Margaret Biggs. Margaret is the Assistant Deputy Minister of Nationally Delivered Programs at Human Resource Development Canada and under her falls the responsibility for sector councils. So Margaret?

**Margaret Biggs:** Thank you, Andrew. I'm going to skip over the successes of the sector councils and all the things that they can do in terms of making a more efficient labour market because the other speakers have really addressed that and I think that's well known to this room. So on the question of how to make them more effective, I was going to identify six issues, most of which have already been identified as well by the other speakers.

The first one is around how we sustain them. We know they're successful, we know that they play an important role in terms of making important linkages and human resources partnerships and planning and addressing market failures but do we have the best model in terms of sustaining them and making them effective and efficient? It isn't just a question of more money; it's whether we have a business model and a funding model to meet our mutual objectives, public and private.

The second issue, very related though, is around results. We need to focus on accountability and results. I think we all know that the sector councils are very effective in what they do but we have to prove this business case. We have to demonstrate the results that we're gaining in a way that the public and governments and the private sector can all understand in order to build support for them. And I know the councils themselves are very open to doing this. And that in turn I think will help inform the business model and the funding model that we want to have.

The third issue really is around reach. We have many successful models but we need to cover more of the labour market. We need greater labour market coverage. We need to expand into non-traditional sectors, for example construction which is coming on stream shortly. We need to move into the public sector, for example in the area of health. We need to reach down into sectors and be more responsive to regional and local needs; and we need to share, as many of the people have indicated already, we need to share best practices, we need more knowledge transfer across these councils and sector partnerships. And finally, we also need to pull out and extract from our sector experiences more things that are pan-Canadian in national significance. We have a tool here

to really address some of the national labour market needs and issues around mobility in the country.

Fourth, we need more innovation. The councils have been very innovative but we need to capitalize even further on the emerging technologies, for example to establish diagnostic tools for human resource planning. We need to position the sector councils as the brokers that can offer not just one, but a suite of sector specific tools and learning initiatives, whether that be:

- in the area of distance learning and technology assisted learning;
- in the area of coaching and mentoring;
- in the area of brokering and assessing internship opportunities;
- in the area of web based or diagnostic tools; or
- in the area of credential recognition or essential skills.

Some have been started in some councils but we can transfer them across others. Much has been done and we can do even more.

The fifth area or challenge that we need to build on is in the area of linkages, which again is one of the strengths of the sectoral approach. But we can go even further because the challenge is really to strengthen the linkages to the educational and training systems, to the apprenticeship systems, to the regional delivery systems, even to our own department, and to the information specialists.

And sixth, we need to preserve and strengthen the flexibility of the sectoral approach. As the minister indicated last night, we need approaches that work at whatever stage we're at of an economic cycle and this is what the sector councils have been so good at doing. We need to be able to respond to changing labour market needs: whether we're on an upswing and we're looking at labour shortages and skill shortages and planning for the future due to demographic change; or whether we're in the downturn and need to look again at industrial adjustment and different kinds of opportunities. The sector councils are perfectly positioned to be flexible to the changing needs of the labour market.

So those are the main challenges I see in terms of making councils even more successful as a tool for addressing some of our skills and learning needs.

Moderator: Thank you very much Margaret. Now we're going to turn it over to general discussion.