

HEADLINE: Round Table on Creating a More Efficient Labour Market in Canada Hosted by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards: Second Session - Promoting a More Efficient Labour Market Through Better Labour Market Information

PRINCIPAL: Ron Stewart, Director General, Labour Market Directorate at Human Resource Development Canada

Moderator: Thank you very much. Our fourth speaker in the session is Ron Stewart who is Director General in the Labour Market Directorate at Human Resource Development Canada. Ron?

Ron Stewart: Thank you. I'm going to give a short presentation on HRDC labour market perspective on labour market information. Certainly within HRDC there is a significant amount of product development that takes place. I think the major challenges lie in the area of coordination, integration and dissemination as to where we want to go. I agree with Elaine, the critical thing in high quality labour information is that it's got to be timely, accurate, relevant and accessible. If it doesn't make those four tests then no one's going to bother with it.

The present situation in HRDC is that we have about 150 staff dedicated to analysing labour market information at the local office levels. And I really think that the local office area, the local level is critical. Anyone who goes in looking for labour market information, well not everyone, but 95% of those people, want to know what's happening in their community, what their jobs and opportunities are. So an investment at the local level is imperative and I think it's probably an under-investment at about 150 people across the country dedicated to this function from HRDC.

There are some good things. We have the National Job Bank. It's Canada's largest job site. There are 2000 job orders and renewals per day placed in the job bank and there are 450,000 jobs listed there per year. And there are 38 million pages viewed per month by the general population. So it is a big site. It is the sixth busiest site in Canada. It may have slipped to seventh with Napster, I'm not sure, but it used to be six. We have Job Futures, national and provincial versions. We have CanLearn which is post-secondary education information on options and financing and this was an Internet 2000 award-winning site for learning. There's local, as I mentioned, local labour market information sites in each of our local offices. We have the National Occupation Classification System. We have distribution networks such as the Internet kiosks and publications. As Andrew mentioned, this document that came out on the 100 top internet sites for learning and employment it was produced by our youth directorate, a very good item.

But there are issues and gaps; there's no question about that. There's a lack of integration and coordination among the product sources and programs. We did a survey. There are about 3000 labour market information products in Canada. So there's probably some degree of overlap and duplication in that meld. There's certainly a need to make new and existing LMI products and services more relevant, that is timely and targeted and accessible. The information isn't always tailored to client skills and needs. There's a lack of awareness of existing skills, related products and services. There's a lack of appropriate media to access information and there's a shortage of skilled staff to develop and deliver LMI, at least in an HRDC context.

We are working with the provinces through the Forum of Labour Market Ministers. There is a federal/provincial coordinating activity on this. There is a permanent secretariat established in Edmonton co-funded by the federal government and the provinces and territories. There is an FLMM agreement to create a more coherent, relevant, individualized, accessible and coordinated approach to the development and delivery of LMI at the local, provincial and national level and that's an actual FLMM agreement.

How are we going to try to address some of these gaps?

Well first, information is not tailored to client needs. We're going to have to target it to meet user needs. This will mean gathering and providing data to identify what skills are in demand. We're going to need to integrate the labour exchange portal with the job labour market information, work destination and work search products. And we have a new employer's online site to help small and medium sized businesses. That latter one was co-produced with Industry Canada and it's a very, very good site and it could very well end up being the main employer portal for government online.

We need to build the capacity at our local level through staffing and staff training. We need to improve our feedback mechanisms to get better live information and feedback on how people are finding the systems. We get a lot of feedback on the Job Bank. People really like it but they're very disappointed when they don't get a job so we tend to get more negative feedback on that although they like the site. We've got to promote our products better than we do. This is a good start but we've got to do more of that. We've got to advertise. You see monster.ca gets a lot of advertising. You don't see any advertising for the Job Bank or very little advertising for things like the Job Bank and some of the other products that we have.

So hopefully, what we want to go from is the situation right now which is focussed on the unemployed (that has been traditionally the primary focus of LMI within HRDC) to one that's really focussed on all Canadians and probably on the economic class of immigrant abroad that we wish to attract. We've got to go from finding a job focus to finding a job and also skills upgrading. We've got to

move from independent systems to a coherent system. I'm reluctant to say integrated because in the real world we would probably want to have hot links to numerous other sites. But there are numerous legal issues. There are proprietary issues. It's a little bit like somebody coming over for dinner and during a good conversation you say well maybe my neighbour could help you. You might be able to take that person and drop them at the neighbour's door but you can't really walk into the neighbour's house and sit him down at the table unless the neighbour is welcoming of that individual. We want to go from generic to individualized information, provincially and locally relevant, and we want to go from a limited access situation to multiple access options. It takes time, it takes money, it takes commitment and it takes effort but that's our vision and that's where we'd like to go.

Moderator: Okay, thank you very much Ron. That was a very good overview of products that Human Resource Development Canada provides in the LMI area.