**CSLS Roundtable on Creating a More Efficient Labour Market in Canada
Feb. 26-27, 2001, Chateau Laurier, Ottawa, Ontario**

Participants' Discussion

Session 2   Promoting a More Efficient Labour Market Through Better Labour Market Information

Moderator: Okay thank you very much Ron (Stewart). That was a very good overview of products that Human Resource Development Canada provides in the LMI area. Who would like to get the discussion going? Who's first on our list here? Sherri?

Sherri Torjman:

Thanks. My question is for Ron and just to pick up on your point about timely and accurate information, we work with a number of local and regional governments that clearly are concerned about timely and accurate information with respect to the local labour market. One of the concerns that they have is that much of the information is two years out of date by the time they get it or it's a two-year let's say historic perspective and they get a picture of what their labour market looked like two years ago and I know that that probably could be advanced. But I guess what they're really asking for is a prospective view on what might be coming down the road and I wonder if there's any work going on with respect to some of the prospective labour market information. And my second question just had to do with whether local help wanted indices take into account some of the electronic hiring banks to which you made reference.

Ron Stewart: On your latter question I don't know.

Sherri Torjman:

Because we've heard that they don't. We've heard that they look primarily at print adds in newspapers and that they may be capturing perhaps, you know, 30% of opportunities in any given community in addition to other kinds of sources of information. So that's just information. Thank you.

Ron Stewart:

In relation to your first question there is work taking place. For example in the metro Toronto region where we've managed to pool our labour market analysts into one location. They're going out to a lot of employers, going out to the chambers of commerce, folks like that and trying to get some projection of their skill requirements. So it, again it comes back, Sherri, to that issue of resources at the local level to get out there and do this kind of work because it does require either physically knocking on doors or electronically knocking on doors and

getting the attention of the people, the managers, etc., getting their attention to sit down and focus on future needs and I think that the sector councils are going to be a very important player in the labour market information as we move out but there is activity taking place in that.

Sherri Torjman:

Just a brief follow-up comment and that is there was an organization in Winnipeg that had told us they were trying to go out and find out about local jobs and when they asked employers about jobs they didn't get a very good response but when they asked employers about what work they had available they got a very big response and employers were making a distinction between jobs available and work available which they found very interesting because they were able to put together some jobs through combining pieces of work for many people who formerly were unemployed.

David Slater (Secretary-Treasurer, Centre for the Study of Living Standards):

I was in the Department of Finance when we did the first survey and the problem was that it's a little like an index number problem. You want to have fairly consistent coverage so that you have got something that's reliable as an index but you've also of course, and that's why the thing really was based on newspaper, a set of newspapers, what you have of course is a little like a quality change in the price index. How do you work in as a proper index form sources of information other than lines in a newspaper? I'm sure it's doable to do something but it isn't easy. The interesting question I think would be whether the wanted index is a reasonably good proxy for what's going on overall. It's years since I've been at that game so I can't say. But it certainly is a question that could be investigated.

Moderator: Okay. I have a list here so get my attention and I'll put you on the list. I will start with Bruce Baldwin. Bruce, did you have a comment?

Bruce Baldwin:

Thanks Andrew. The issue was obviously too complicated for David Dodge to deal with, I mean he had to move on to easier issues to resolve and hopefully he fares better on those. I'd certainly support the notion that the biggest gap we face on the labour market information side is in the availability of locally relevant information. People don't make decisions on national averages and telling people what the national average in an occupation is useless and perhaps quite harmful. You trade that off - I mean the difficulty in getting accurate information and especially information that allows for some projection at a local level, I mean it becomes really, really difficult in terms of the availability of local statistics that you can start to apply to make those projections. I mean those, when you start forecasting, you need to look at retirement issues, projections of growth within

industry and within firms, start to look at the supply of people coming through education and training systems to start to sort out what the balances or imbalances are. Some of those issues around projections on retirements and growth from firms are issues that - is information that's a little bit sensitive for firms and in some cases on a provincial or a national basis a firm might be able to share some information because it gets aggregated and it's hard to tell where it's coming from. You lose that when you're dealing in a local basis, when you start asking nickel producers in Sudbury what's going on. You can narrow those things down a little bit easier. So you do start to lose some of the accuracy of projections at a local level.

Leads to my other point which is around dealing with users, both individuals who are making decisions and people who are assisting in that decision-making process. We need to attach some degree of cautions to the information that we're providing. Again, forecasting models are - we don't have a wonderful track record. Nursing as an example is probably a pretty good one where it's hard to factor in all of the policy decisions that affect the supply and demand on nursing overtime and we have to realize that say, kids leaving high school, are starting to make decisions that will only sort of - that will only start to bear fruit five, six, seven years down the line and you know we need to provide the best information we can but we can't pretend that that's going to be smack on every time.

Moderator: Thank you. Lenore?

Lenore Berton (Associate Dir. Gen., HRDC):

They say that language frames thought and the trouble for too long in the past has been I think that labour market information is too narrow a construct or we have used it in too narrow a way. We've used it in the sense of matching a job seeker to a job and I would hope that we would add to your four standards of timely, accurate, relevant and accessible, complete information. If that's the job that's available in my local area, these are the skills that are required, how do I go about acquiring those skills? I would use a different analogy than warehouse, Elaine. I would use a marketplace. The trouble with a warehouse is things are in boxes and they're not always visually displayed so that I know what box I need to go to. But in a marketplace I can buy my vegetables and my bread and my cheese, etc.

Unless we are able to bring in that whole aspect of skills that Margaret referred to and connect that skills construct with where do I acquire, how do I acquire that knowledge and that ability to do something, we're really limiting ourselves in our thinking on where we should be going with labour market information and I want to add my voice to Margaret's saying that whole emphasis on developing the technical side of the NOC to a better understanding of what skills and at what levels are needed in the labour market is absolutely critical now. That's what's going to lead us to where do I find the learning that'll help me acquire those skills

and it's also the critical foundation piece to recognizing the skills that people already have and I'm thinking about for workers that have been trained in other countries, it's really difficult for us to go through the process of assessing exactly what skills they have because we need that benchmark against okay, if this is what they know and can do, and this is what they need to know and be able to do in our labour market in Canada, we need that foundation piece, we need that NOC to be developed.

Moderator: Thank you Lenore. Andrew Jackson, did you have a comment?

Andrew Jackson (Dir. Of Research, Canadian Council on Social Development):

I just wanted to flag quickly a couple of items that I'd see as labour market information gaps that are kind of relevant here that should be filled. I guess the fact is most of our labour force information comes from the labour force survey which of course tells us a lot in terms of occupation and education levels of workers and whether people are employed or not but it does tend to lead us to the kind of assumption that there's a kind of very close fit between the occupation of a person in a job and the needs of the job which is somewhat problematic when you think about it for a moment especially when you think about most job vacancies being filled by people moving around between jobs constantly within the labour market. And it seems to me that there's a really important kind of thread of analysis that was developed by Graham Lowe and Harvey Krahn sort of using quite limited data from the general social survey which was really asking people about the fit between their skills and education and experience and the actual jobs that they were working in which disclosed quite a fair amount of under-utilization of skills in jobs and suggested there's actually a fairly major reservoir of skills out there that aren't being well tapped. But the information base for that kind of analysis is really limited. I mean it's just sort of occasional questions on the general social survey. You've got much richer sources of data for some of those issues on some of the European quality of working life surveys that really get at the use of skills on the job. So I'd see that as a really big kind of information gap that we should be sort of trying to fill.

I guess the other one that sort of strikes me as a bit of a gap and I might be off base here but I guess I mean the labour force survey of course is just a series of snapshots but we now do have the SLED following a sample of people in the labour force all the time. I'm not sure anybody's done much analysis on SLED of actual career trajectories and the extent to which people shift from one occupation to another, what sort of trajectories over time look like. So I think that's a fairly elementary kind of a level of analysis of what's going on the labour market. I mean it's a really important question I think for individuals, I mean what are the kinds of jobs one should access that lead to much better career trajectories and options over time as opposed to the kind of employment, non-employment things. So I think both of those areas are sort of worth exploring.

Moderator: Okay, thank you Andrew. Lars, do you have an intervention?

Lars Osberg (McCullough Professor of Economics, Dalhousie Univ.):

I'd like to raise the issue of sort of the costs and benefits of different types of information. I mean think of the old style of information about capabilities, the old style curriculum vita, it was kind of a backward looking thing. It said what you had done in the past, like what jobs you'd had, what courses you'd taken and the person who read that sort of imputed from what a person had done what they were probably likely to have in the way of skills. I mean if you've been an assistant deputy minister for a while we know you're a very political animal and work very hard and all that sort of stuff. But the big advantage was is it didn't take very many resources to prepare and it was pretty verifiable as to whether it was true or not. Now the new style CV you'd say to everybody well I'm a wonderful person to work with but as the standard phrase goes well he would say that, wouldn't he? And the question is therefore how do we verify it? And what's the cost of verifying it?

And I thought I heard the suggestion that we were going to have a skills inventory for Canada as a whole and a whole range of skills which are admittedly very important like the ability to work with people and all sorts of other things but which are inherently pretty soft and very difficult to measure and very difficult to categorize. And of course these are about people who are continually changing and about jobs that are continually changing and so are we going to come back and revisit these people every six months and find out whether they've developed new social skills or just - I mean how are we going to keep this sort of inventory up to date and when we have a whole set of new skills like visualization of web sites or whatever, I mean how are we going to change this filing system for this well organized warehouse? So I'm mainly just wondering if there's any idea out there about just how much it's going to cost to update this filing system for this well organized warehouse or update this inventory of the national bank of skills and all these huge number of dimensions of whether it's actually required in real life in constantly changing jobs.

Moderator: Does anyone want to respond to that question before I go on to the list of speakers? Yes, Margaret.

Margaret Roberts (Consultant):

I just wanted to mention in my discussion anyway I was thinking strictly of technical skills and skills that can be tested. I was not thinking of - I think the expert panel breaks skills down into several categories but the recommendation only applies to two. One was essential skills and the other was technical skills and they identified the other types as I think management skills - I've got it here

somewhere but in any case, interpersonal type skills, etc. and certainly that's not what I was talking about. I was talking about sort of hard skills. Okay, leadership skills, conceptual skills, management skills and essential skills and technical skills. But the recommendation was only regarding the first two.

Moderator: Okay if there's no other comments on that issue I'll go on to our list. Elizabeth Beale.

Elizabeth Beale (President and CEO, Atlantic Provinces Economic Council):

Thank you. I just wanted to comment on the use of labour market information for two functions, one to improve the product line and also the data and build-up of research and analytical capacity and that's the area that I would like to focus on as being extremely important, both to help us to take more of a long term perspective on labour market changes but also because there is a real need to disseminate this information beyond the individual departments and partners who are involved in the program delivery because there are so many of us now who are - the whole flow of human capital now is so pervasive right throughout the economy that we all need a better understanding of this. So in that context I really want to endorse the recommendations of the expert panel. There's recommendations there that really go after this.

On the first one with respect to the Social Science and Humanities Council there has already been 100 million over five years targeted at a new economy initiative and most of that initiative is being directed at issues related to human capital so it's not exclusively a labour market initiative but the way it's going it looks like it will focus very much on issues such as education and training, lifelong learning, a whole range of issues related to management skills and occupations. So it's not everything but it's certainly a start in that direction.

On the topic of the federal/provincial labour market research fund again I think that's an extremely progressive idea to sort of match the partnership that's happened on the program delivery side in terms of federal, provincial, and other players. But we don't really have any capacity yet to bring all those research questions or coordinate or enhance the research effort in that area. So I think that would match it. And similarly on a centre for labour market statistics I think Stats Can and other players would be very receptive to doing that. We've had many discussions around Stats Can on the need to provide more coordination and a more enhanced effort in terms of labour market statistics.

The other point I just wanted - which is really related is a number of the speakers referred to the need to coordinate and integrate and disseminate and I strongly and heartily endorse that. We're getting some very great information now at the local level which is improving program delivery and improving the partnerships but we don't always have any mechanisms to disseminate that back up the pipes to other partners and so in other words the information often goes on the corporate service side rather than up to researchers and we have, for example,

within Atlantic Canada a number of small units. We really don't have any capacity at the moment as I understand it to provide any coordination on any of these research issues that would come out of this whole area. So again, I very strongly endorse that.

Moderator:　　　　Okay, thank you Elizabeth. Deborah.

Deborah Burns (Acting Exec. Dir., Planning, N. B. Dept. of Training & Employment Development):

Thank you Andrew. I just want to make a couple of points that some have already been made. But any of us in the field who work in labour - in the field of labour market information or work with people who do, it's a really tough job because we don't have a definition of LMI is and I think many people who produce or deliver labour market information have run into users saying well the information was no good. And the reason they're saying that is because it either didn't tell them what they wanted to hear or when they said LMI they were thinking job vacancies and someone else is thinking wage rates in a certain part of the city and someone else is thinking a skills profile. So when we're talking about developing or providing or seeking labour market information, we have to make sure that we're all speaking the same language and knowing what we mean.

I'm totally convinced that we have to go skill based not occupational base. I also like the notion of work as opposed to jobs. In New Brunswick we have done considerable work on the skill based idea and have had quite a bit of work done towards defining sets of skills as opposed to occupations. Labour profiling or skill profiling is a major concern of our government now and we have a major mandate to proceed with that and also of course working with our federal colleagues on it.

The importance of the LMI and the skill profiling in terms of taking a defined area and saying here's what the skills of the people there look like, that's what I mean by profiling. It has a very important role in economic development and we have come a long ways in convincing our economic development partners that they can't just say okay, we're going to - this is the sector, this is the industry sector we're going to grow in this area. They also have to consider what the are the skills of the people in that area now so therefore what types of industries is the shortest training gap between what the people have now and what they need for the industries that they want to develop. So the LMI I think has a very important role, both on developing the supply and in developing the demand and we have to stress that part as well.

Moderator:　　　　Thank you. David, did you have some comment?

David Stewart Patterson (Senior V-P, Policy and Communications, BCNI):

Thanks very much. I just wanted to follow up on a comment that Sherri Torjman made and particularly the distinction she addressed between jobs that are available and work that's available because I think that touches on an important aspect of the whole question of what is that governments should be trying to do in terms of improving the labour market information. I'm kind of skeptical about the notion that we can feasibly create a single window if you want with a uniform language in terms of a predictive tool, in terms of offering people good information about where jobs are going to be available and what kinds of jobs are going to be available. First of all, that kind of information - the market for that kind of information is essentially customer driven now. It's not something governments sort of, you know, graciously supply to the population. People will seek information from all available sources. Governments can, you know, through a jobs bank and so on can make a valuable contribution to that, they can enhance the quality of information available but they certainly can't monopolize it and as a result I don't think they can monopolize the language either, certainly not when it comes to the definition of jobs.

The comment was just made about the need to move to a skill base from an occupational base and I think that's very important because frankly the big problem with trying to have uniform language in describing jobs is that the job descriptions themselves are changing too often. Even within a given employer description - new skills come into play, become required constantly and even individual companies are not terribly good at predicting how many people they're going to need in a particular job even months out, never mind the years out that would be required for somebody to make a useful choice about well, what courses should I take now for graduation four years from now. And while, you know, while uniform classification may help you capture existing gaps in the labour market, I mean we know short by umpteen thousand nurses and that's a problem we have to deal with, it doesn't capture emerging job classifications. In the early '90s, it's not that many years ago, that when I was still in the journalism business and the first time somebody said well if you want a hot job in the media business start learning how to be a web master. I mean at that point it was a term that wasn't even defined and yet I think everybody around this table has a web site at their organization. They know they need people to develop it, run it, run it effectively, enhance its utility and so on. Trying to capture, you know, what the next decade's web master classifications are going to be, it becomes very difficult.

Where I think common language is needed and would become very useful comes in the area of skills and skills recognition, particularly recognition of credentials, recognition of equivalency in terms of training. Paul Swinwood mentioned earlier, you know, there's 4,876 different IT training companies offering courses out there. Well one observation that flows from that is clearly there's a huge need out there for training that isn't being met by convention colleges and universities, that a whole bunch of people have figured out how

faster to respond to the kinds of training people want and require. On the other hand that proliferation has created another problem, both for employers and for employees in terms of figuring out well, I've got a credential from this IT institute, what's it worth, what's it equivalent to? If I go to a new employer, how does that new employer know, you know, how to integrate what I already know how to do into the ongoing training program that that employer may offer? So I think that's - you know, and for an employee, in terms of making decisions about should I go with this college or that college, that institute, again a better understanding, a common language if you want in terms of what's this credential going to be worth, what is it going to enable me to do, I mean that kind of information is both feasible to develop and would be more useful.

So I would suggest, you know, focussing on a common framework not for trying to predict where the job gaps are going to be but for measuring what people learn, what they know, what work they can do. And I think that would be a more useful tool because than then links into as Lenore was saying, what skills should I be trying to acquire and where can I acquire them?

Moderator: Thanks very much David. Margaret did you have a comment?

Margaret Biggs:

Thanks Andrew and I guess I'm going to build a little bit off what David just said. I'm not an expert in this area at all although I'm responsible for figuring some of this out and making some of this happen, and I guess I just wanted to raise really more of a question because I think what we really have to focus on is what's, like we did with the sector discussion, what's the role of government on here, what's the public interest in the public, where do markets fail and when do governments have to intervene? And there's lot of stuff in here that the private sector is doing that the customers and the private interests are filling all kinds of gaps. There's a market out there for lots of this kind of information. But doesn't the market do as well? And it seems to me that David was on - you know, was identifying where there may be a public interest in terms of governments and it's not on the quick job matching because people can do that pretty easily and maybe there's some facilitation. But it really is on the bigger issues at a national level, in terms of credential recognition, in terms of really the skills requirements of the future and how people can plan and identify it. Jobs are coming and going. Occupations are splitting and dividing and disappearing more quickly than we can anticipate but the component parts, the composites of those, the skills required to do these jobs I think we can identify and we need to identify and that's the basis upon which we need to build more of a common language. So I'm not particularly articulate on this but I just think that we need to figure out what the niche is for public policy here and I think in the past maybe this is Elaine's point and Lenore's point, I think governments felt that if we built it people would come and to a certain extent they did, and more information was better, and maybe it is. But I

think that now we have to figure out like what information governments should be in the business of and it may not be - if there's finite resources it may be that we need to stop doing some things because that's not really where our value added is and we need to do more, invest more in some other areas and I think we need to identify those.

Moderator: Thank you. George?

George Nakitsas:

Just to piggyback on the last couple of points. One comment and one suggestion from the vantage of a user. We've been using labour market information for 15 years in our organization and congratulations to everybody that is active, public, private, federal, provincial. I think there has been a huge change in the last 20 years that reflects the fact that we used to live in a very static economy and have moved to an economy where everybody says I don't have the skills or I've got the skills and I can survive the rest of my life. Now it's I've got the skills and what do I have to pick up tomorrow to continue to have them? So I think speakers touched two important points there in terms of changes that have been made and need to continue. One is what we gather, and I know in our industry, in steel, the occupations you used to have last week don't exist today. And so moving from - I don't think you have to get rid of them but it's getting a broader base of the type of information you're keeping is very important. Moving to the local level has been very essential in terms of the National Job Bank, ELE, we use them very effectively and more and more we get local information.

But now we have to move and we have moved I think to a much more dynamic and integrated system where it's the developers, the users and the providers, to take Lenore's point of who can actually give you the skills and knowledge you need and I think the more and more we develop those partnerships, whether it be with the counselor association, the school system, organizations like sector councils, community based organizations and they're developed in those types of strategic joint ventures you get four benefits. You find out what's relevant and what's not, and (inaudible) point is something not relevant? That's depending on keeping it updated because if the users aren't going to use it, developers shouldn't be developing it but you also get a sense on an ongoing way of what are going to be outside the specific needs today the sort of trends toward the future. So I think congratulations are in order that we have recognized that and I would hope that we continue moving in that direction rather than trying to create a perfect world or as someone once said to me, getting the answers to our own questions and finding out that our own questions are almost irrelevant because we have common questions, now we need to find common answers.

Moderator: Thanks. David, did you have a comment and then Noah?

David Slater:

I offer a couple of comments. I think that it's very important to think about what I might call fundamental skills as distinct from learned and applied skills. I think that if I was still a university professor I don't think I'd care very much about what subjects people took except that I'd hope they had some good mathematics, some good language, some good conceptual skills, some good communication skills and so on. These are fundamental. I remember when I was a graduate dean advising people in theoretical physics. There was a surplus of theoretical physicists and not many jobs. Well those people turned out to be the heart of the information technology revolution. They had those kinds of skills.

I think that one of the things that is very, very critical is if governments start getting too uppity about humanities and fundamentals, things and so on, universities and want more and more applied stuff of the universities. I think that may be the wrong way to go. I think one of the other things that's interesting is to distinguish between, as they call it, these fundamental skills and particular applied skills like being a medical doctor or a nurse or something else which you can't pick up, no matter how bright you are, with a six-month, part-time training exercise. But there are an awful lot of things. If you've got mathematical skills, language skills, writing skills, conceptualizing skills and so on, you can do an enormous range of things with very little add-on training and I think we can push too far in the occupational direction as distinct from the skill development that David spoke of.

Moderator: Thank you very much. Noah?

Noah Meltz:

When I first started out in the area of looking at occupations, which was exactly 40 years ago in terms of a particular project, it was to look at how occupations within firms had changed and the study was - there was then the wage rate survey, you got a total list of the occupations that firms had and the wage rates, how many people and so within the Department of Labour what we did was we selected a few firms and did an occupational profile of the firms at - I hate to say how far back, it was 1948 that we started as a base and then to 1961 what they actually had, we compared them and looked at how their output had changed and how technology had changed and wage structure and I remember one firm they looked at, in 1948 they had a chauffeur but not in 1961. But in 1961 there was a special assistant to the president, which there wasn't in 1948. Guess what the special assistant to the president did? He was the chauffeur. Which gets to David point about how occupation titles change but sometimes there's a change of work and sometimes there isn't.

In the expert panel we spent a lot of time talking about the question of skill and I think that's certainly reflected in the report but as part of the input and Derwin

Sangster and I there was a day that we looked at occupations and skill, the measuring of occupations and skills and the morning session was on occupations. A lot of discussions people focussed on that, then the afternoon session - Derwin can correct me - very quiet. Everyone said yes, a good idea to look at skills but it was very quiet in terms of how we'd actually go about measuring these. So as was mentioned by a number of speakers, this is a very tough area. It's a very important area but I think we really need two things. We have to look at skills and how we measure what we need and more work has to be done and that's what the panel tried to do.

However, I think also think we need something on the occupation definition, occupation, type of work, something and the technology I still believe will force some, at least move in the direction of commonality. You have to be able to communicate. Computers demand, if you're looking at things, you're looking up, you have to define what you're looking at. So I think we really need both sides of this in terms of the job area.

Elizabeth Beale mentioned the Centre for Labour Market Statistics. In our recommendations we felt, and hopefully this will be supported, that not only should the centre be established as a sort of a federal, provincial, territorial initiative because of the importance, as was stressed here, of local labour market information, but the need to look at how we're going to measure these things and how we're going to try to disseminate that information. And the role of the Forum of Labour Market Ministers as a support for this and as a vehicle for creating an interest, awareness and also how this information might be used. So these are - I think these are all very important.

The last point gets to the analytical side and something that perhaps could be elaborated on in terms of what the expert panel did because there was one area we also talked about and that was entrepreneurship. And so far I think we've been talking about the job market in terms of there are jobs available, how do we get the people to them, what sort of jobs will be available in the future? But there's another dimension that gets to the entrepreneurship area and that is that where are there gaps that drawing from - gaps in terms of areas where people can be - entrepreneurs can initiate, can fill gaps, can open new areas. I mean if you take the warehouse example what we want to add to it, how do we talk about creating new warehouses, new stores, new opportunities to market and then that's where we want to move beyond - labour markets are dynamic but we also want to fill in areas where people can help to create jobs within the country and to use the knowledge that may come from analysis, where are there areas where people can really initiate, can really say hey, you know, there's - we in Canada could do something in this area. We can also market CSTEC and the other sectoral skills abroad but we can use the information from analysis to be able to create new jobs, to be able to expand the market and not just help people within the market get jobs and I think this is where HRDC has a fundamental role on the analytical side to play, to use the information, to help to disseminate where gaps,

where people looking for future careers can help to create something and not just say well there's going to be a job in the area. How do you help to create jobs in future areas?

Just one last example of this, I'm also in Israel now and a very successful model has been what's called incubators, giving scientists who have ideas some funding to help create and market things where they have an idea and they want to bring it on stream. And this is a way I think in terms of entrepreneurship we want to look at areas where in Canada there are - there's the potential either to market within Canada or to market outside, where we need - where we can draw on information we can get from analysis.

Moderator: Thank you very much Noah. Bert Pereboom.

Bert Pereboom:

I just want to talk a little bit about this issue of timeliness of data and I work with a number of sector councils and they're interested in labour market information and say one of the things they're interested in is say the demographics of their labour force. Right now about the best we can do is look at census data from 1996, which draws sort of sighs of exasperation typically. Five years ago is eons and our labour force is no longer - like we could debate about whether labour forces change very much in five years but it seems to me that we need to provide data on a more timely basis and I think one of the more promising areas, even though there are some public perception problems, is using administrative data more effectively for labour market information.

There's huge amounts of information clearly available within federal government records of various types that could be used to provide better labour market information and I know we'll get the press stories about big brother watching people and so on but for one example let's say age structure of a particular industry workforce. I know CPP has at least on me they know my SIN number, they know my age, they know my gender. Now, they probably also from various, you know, tax records and so on know which industry I'm working in and so on. You could pull that information together and provide quite a timely piece of information rather than going out the time and expense of doing a survey of a particular industry, you could collect this admin data in a fairly cost effective way. It's already input, it's already electronic, it can be analyzed. So it seems to me that, you know, timely, cost-effective sources of information would probably - you don't necessarily want to duplicate all that data collection. You can use admin records in a lot of cases to gather this and provide it more effectively.

Moderator: Okay, thanks Bert. Paul, you had a point.

Paul Swinwood:

I just want to make sure that Noah and Margaret and Margaret Biggs realise that thanks to the partnership with HRDC and some of the other things going on across the country, the software council and the sector have created 21 new national occupation codes that will be released soon and in partnership with a small organization called Stats Canada we've already done a validation of these occupational skills model that the council has created and Stats Canada has gone out and done a pilot with employee and employer survey around that, that does get to some of the detail that you're looking at. So we have what we call the occupational skills profile model which is 24 streams for the high tech sector which we can't do longitudinal connection to the 1954 census - well, longitudinal, horizontal, whatever the connections are because we didn't exist at that time. So we're very interested in a survey process that happens quarterly. It has to happen quarterly because in my sector that's the rate of change. And so we're looking at a process that takes this, makes it a national survey that we can do nationally and report locally in partnership with the local communities, the local high tech associations and everything else.

When we did this survey we had 97% response rate from the companies that we talked to about talking to their employees. So it was rather stunning to - it's caused several challenges in the collection of data so we're hoping to have something on this in the next hours, weeks, days. And that's probably as far as I can go right now with it. But thanks to the partnership that has been demonstrated between the sector, the sector council, hundreds of private sector companies, HRDC and Stats Canada, you can get relevant data. We're still trying on the timely. It will be accessible when we can get our hands on it through technology and so it is possible to do. We have a pilot that's in place that's proving that. So we have some good news coming down that partnerships do work.

Moderator: Well thanks Paul for that note. Are there any other comments from people that haven't spoken yet or people that would like to speak again? Yes, Derwin?

Derwin Sangster:

Further to the point that Bert made, and just - and I guess a question for HRDC and indeed any other organization that operates maybe a sectoral equivalent of an electronic labour exchange and that is that it seems to me, and I think the panel discussed it during its discussions, that every time the ELE is used there is a transaction, indeed a labour market transaction that is brought about where a certain set of skills on the part of an individual are matched roughly against a certain set of requirements from a job and the issue I guess there is whether there is any technical capacity to, if you will, monitor the functioning of the labour market through capturing information that may be generated almost electronically through these transactions, occupations, call them occupations, call them jobs, call them skill sets. Has that been looked at from the point of view of using ELE

"administrative data" or transaction data to learn more about what's happening out there?

Moderator: Does anyone want to respond to that? Go ahead.

Ron Stewart:

Derwin, primarily it's been sort of a volume type thing versus a specific type of exchange that's taking place. Now one of the things that we are doing is we're integrating the Job Bank and the ELE which will help. We do know that we need better management information out of the system. We're not collecting the SINs of the users so we've got no way of tracking the actual job that's found. We wouldn't want to have the SINs floating over the internet anyway. As well as the integration of that there's also the whole worker, trainer, jobs, GOL cluster that's taking place as well and in regards to that we're (inaudible) ELE with the public service commission's recruitment activities as the first step along that way so this thing is going to grow and your point's well taken, we're going to have to get much better management information out of this thing.

Moderator: André.

André Piché (Senior Policy Analyst, Canadian Federation of Independent Business):

Just a brief comment on a point made by Bert earlier, this morning we talked about private good and public good and when I think of Stats Can, the information that comes out of Stats Can is the public good. I think it's unfortunate in a way that we don't have free access online to a lot of the information from Stats Can. I'm reminded of a speech that was given a couple of years ago about students who do projects in school where they do their research using the US Bureau of Statistics so they do a project that's related to the American system because they don't have access, free access in Canada to the information. And I think it is a shame that that's the case. And I think it's something we should be looking at in terms of - in the context of what we're talking about today.

Moderator: Okay, I would certainly second that point as a researcher. I've certainly encountered problems in getting information. Unfortunately our Statistics Canada representative is not here yet but I'll relay that message to him.

Alice Nakamura (Winspear Professor, Faculty of Business, Univ. of Alberta):

I'd like to strongly support that point. I've been teaching in the Canadian universities since 1972. When I first came here, if you went into the bookstore at the University of Alberta or any other major university's bookstore in this country, you found a whole section of Statistics Canada materials. When I had a class with an empirical project, like any other instructor, I urged my students to go over

there and there were all sorts of materials on the forestry sector, on mining, on wheat, on all sorts of things over there on the shelves that they picked up and brought back and used in their reports. In 1990 we had a move to have cost recovery and I believe largely by mistake Statistics Canada ended up being part of the cost recovery package that was put forward then and was passed. Having had that passed, I've watched Statistics Canada struggling with this. I'm on several of their advisory committees and have been for a long period of time. I've watched the chief statistician and the assistant chief statistician struggle with their role on the one side as public servants who are supposed to uphold the law and the policies of the nation and on the other hand with the ridiculousness of a situation where this information is collected at public expense, individuals and firms spend their time to provide this information, and then they turn around and they have to sell it for cost recovery. If you look in our bookstores now in the universities you will find no Statistics Canada section whatsoever. That lasted about a year and a half at most places after they started to cost recover. No faculty member is urging their students to go and get their data anymore because when you send them over the library to get it, what happens is a lot of them go in and cut a page out or rip the page out or write on the page and then volumes which we all need for long periods of time are defaced. So I just can't think of a more important thing that you could do to make labour market information available to the nation than to follow the United States and if that's going to happen, the impetus has to come from other departments like HRDC. HRDC is the strongest, most powerful department in the federal government.

Moderator: Thanks very much Alice. Are there any other comments? Yes, Carla.

Carla Lipsig- Mummé:

Just following on Alice's comment I suppose we are belabouring an outrage or whatever but what's happening now is a privatization of the costs of data for our students. We are taking from our research grants and paying for them to get the data they need to get from Stats Can and that's surely a perversion of how it should be.

Moderator: Okay, are there any other comments? I'd like ask the lead speakers if they would like to respond to any comments that were made. I think Noah has left but any of the other three lead speakers? Margaret, do you have any comments?

Margaret Roberts:

Just a couple and I think I already covered them but just to make sure it's clear. I think I'm like Noah, I think that both occupation or some kind of grouping of work let's say, not necessarily the word occupation because I think it's more or less successful depending on the area. If you're talking about doctors it's a fairly

successful concept. If we're talking in the IT industry maybe it's not so successful but I think there is a need for some kind of structure and I think there's also a need for skills. The other point I wanted to make is that I do think for sure that this infrastructure development is a role for government. In talking about - I think Margaret asked, you know, what's the role of government in this and certainly I think infrastructure development and maintenance is a role for government.

Moderator: Elaine, do you have any comments? No, okay. We're going to break now for our lunch and then also an address by Lars Osberg. Our lunch is a buffet style. It will be available out there and then you'll have to come in here and eat at your spot. Unfortunately there were no other rooms in the Chateau Laurier to have a separate room for lunch. So we'll break for lunch and we'll probably reconvene around 1:10 to start Lars' address. Thank you very much.