



## Case Study September 2005

### FITTskills

# Building Worldwide Opportunities in Today's Dynamic Global Economy, One Skill at a Time

This case study looks at the impact and benefits that the Forum for International Trade Training's FITTskills program is having on Canada's international trade activities. In particular, it explores how the program affects individuals and impacts organizations involved in the import and export of goods and services. It also considers the keys to success of the FITTskills program and offers insights as to how this model might be replicated or adapted by other Sector Council programs.

**I**nternational trade is a key contributor to Canada's economic well-being. Developing people's skills and knowledge to compete globally is essential for Canada to thrive as a trading nation and compete successfully in international commerce. The Forum for International Trade Training (FITT) is one of 29 Sector Councils in Canada established to enhance worker's skills in a given sector. FITT is one model of how a Sector Council is helping industry, regions, individual companies and workers address international skills

requirements and overcome skills shortages on a national basis.

#### WE ARE A TRADING NATION

As a trading nation, Canada's prosperity and long-term economic growth are linked to how well it performs in the global market. On the micro level, a positive link has also been shown between a company's participation in international trade and its labour productivity and innovation.<sup>1</sup>

The following facts demonstrate the importance of international trade in our economy:

- In 2004, rising export demand accounted for all of the growth in Canada's gross domestic product (GDP), which increased from 1.7 per cent in 2003 to 2.8 per cent in 2004.<sup>2</sup>

- In 2004, exports of Canadian goods and services totalled \$492.6 billion, representing 38.1 per cent of GDP, while imports of goods and services reached \$436.5 billion, or 33.7 per cent of GDP.<sup>3</sup> Some estimates indicate that exports accounted for almost 41.0 per cent of Canada's GDP in 2004.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2003, it is estimated that slightly more than 43,300 organizations in Canada exported goods or services internationally.<sup>5</sup>
- It is estimated that the export of Canadian goods and services account for one in three jobs in Canada,<sup>6</sup> and that for every \$1 billion in new exports generated, approximately 11,000 new jobs are created.<sup>7</sup>
- Exports are also essential to the economies of many provinces, such as Saskatchewan, which has one of the most export-dependent economies in the country. With 73 per cent of its GDP generated by exports, and with a population of just under 1 million, Saskatchewan companies must continue to export in order to survive and grow.<sup>8</sup>

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This large and important part of the Canadian economy speaks volumes for the need for well-trained trade professionals.

The major challenges facing Canada's ability to compete in world markets include:

- the ever-increasing knowledge requirements for businesses (particularly small and medium-sized firms) on how to successfully conduct trade. These include a thorough understanding of international markets, finance, negotiation and trade policy, as well as other general business knowledge;
- businesses' limited financial resources and international contacts; and
- world events occurring beyond the realm of the international business environment that make it increasingly difficult to sustain or develop new trading markets. Examples include the rising health concerns around SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and BSE (mad cow disease), the impact of emerging economic powers such as China and

India, and the growing concern about national security, which has had a direct and immediate impact on border policies. Although these challenges are beyond people's control, having a solid understanding of the international marketplace and its challenges can enable individuals to protect their investments and identify opportunities.

## FORUM FOR INTERNATIONAL TRADE TRAINING

Established in 1992 by industry and government, the Forum for International Trade Training is a national not-for-profit organization that partners with businesses, government, educational institutions and national organizations to develop international trade training programs and services, and to provide individuals with the necessary skills and knowledge needed to succeed in international trade.<sup>9</sup> FITT's core purpose is to increase competency in international trade and build the capacity of Canadian businesses to compete in world markets. FITT offers a range of programs and services, including: classroom and online courses leading to national standards and professional certification; workshops, conferences and other networking opportunities for international practitioners and professionals; and career support and resource materials that help prepare individuals for careers in international business. FITT's programs are delivered across Canada online and through a collaborative network of community colleges, universities and private organizations.

Most notably, FITT is the only organization in Canada to accredit international trade practitioners with a professional designation—Certified International Trade Professional (CITP). It is the CITP designation, and the program through which individuals achieve it, that is the focal point of this case study. The study has three objectives:

- Identify the economic and workplace impacts that FITTskills has on businesses engaged in international trade.
- Identify the benefits that individuals gain by participating in the FITTskills program.
- Identify the keys to success of the FITTskills program and provide insights on how this skills development model might be replicated or adapted by other Sector Council programs.

Qualitative and quantitative data used in this study were gathered using a number of research tools, including a review of Sector Council, government and international trade training literature, and a series of seven in-depth interviews with employees, employers and FITT staff.

## A GROWING DEMAND FOR SKILLED INTERNATIONAL TRADE PROFESSIONALS

Over the past decade, business has become more global as markets continue to open up and free trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement become more prevalent. This economic liberalization has led businesses, industry associations and governments to place growing emphasis on engaging in international trade. In turn, there is a growing demand for international trade skills, as well as for national certification to ensure individuals have a certain level of skills and knowledge to perform in this area.

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## FITTSKILLS

The cornerstone of FITT is its FITTskills program, which consists of eight modules that are taken either individually or as part of a comprehensive program. The courses focus on the fundamental aspects of international business. The FITTskills program has garnered interest and support both nationally and internationally. Its use of real-life examples of what works and what does not work in international trade allows interactive discussion with workshop leaders, guest speakers and other participants. It is taught by instructors who have international trade experience and years of practical knowledge—including successes and failures—that they are eager to share with students. Through a blend of structured curriculum and shared-experiential learning, individuals are able to learn about the world of international trade. Finally, the FITTskills model encourages participants—many of whom are seasoned international practitioners and entrepreneurs themselves—to share their international business experiences with their colleagues.

### Forum for International Trade Training

The Forum for International Trade Training (FITT) helps address the international trade skills gap in all sectors of the economy. It is one of the few Sector Councils building the human resource capacity for all industry sectors.

FITT works closely with business, industry associations, government and educational institutions to design, develop and deliver relevant programs and services that meet industry needs. These activities include:<sup>1</sup>

- **Professional Development**—FITT, along with industry, has developed a range of international training courses offered in classrooms and online.
- **Certification**—FITT is the only nationally recognized certifying body for international trade professionals in Canada. FITT offers two credentials: the FITTskills Certificate and the FITTskills Diploma, which are the educational requirements needed for the Certified International Trade Professional (CITP) designation.
- **Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition (PLAR)**—a process for assessing individuals' skills and knowledge that can be applied toward either of the CITP credentials, without duplicating learning.
- **Career Support**—an online job board for those seeking candidates and for those seeking employment, specifically targeted at international trade.
- **Networking**—an opportunity to network with hundreds of FITT members and international trade practitioners at local meetings and events, as well as at an annual national conference.

<sup>1</sup> For further information about FITT's programs and services, go to: [www.fitt.ca](http://www.fitt.ca).

The eight courses that make up the FITTskills program are:

1. *Global Entrepreneurship*—the fundamentals of international trade and what it takes to compete internationally.
2. *International Trade Research*—the importance of understanding target markets and how to research them.
3. *International Marketing*—the ins and outs of marketing in the global economy and what it takes to outdistance the competition.
4. *International Trade Finance*—the steps needed to secure financing for international projects, and what is required to get through complex ventures.
5. *International Trade Logistics*—the importance of an export team, document preparation and transportation when getting products to market.
6. *International Market Entry and Distribution*—the importance of building and following a road map in order to overcome obstacles along the way to getting products to an intended user.
7. *Legal Aspects of International Trade*—the international legal implications of expansion into global markets, through the eyes of management.

8. *International Trade Management*—the need to manage international trade activities more effectively by dealing with strategy, innovation and competitive advantage.

## RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF LEARNING

There are a few learning milestones associated with the FITTskills program:

- The successful completion of any four FITTskills courses provides participants with a FITT Certificate, accredited by the International Association of Trade Training Organizations (IATTO).<sup>10</sup>
- The successful completion of all eight FITTskills courses provides participants with a FITT Diploma, which is also accredited by IATTO.

In addition to obtaining a FITT Diploma, individuals who complete all eight FITTskills courses also satisfy the educational requirements for the CITP designation.<sup>11</sup>

### The Certified International Trade Professional—CITP

The CITP designation is the highest level of professional accreditation available to international business and trade professionals in Canada. To become a registered CITP, an individual must meet all of the educational requirements of the FITTskills program; complete a minimum year-long practical work experience in an international business trade environment; and successfully complete the FITT-administered CITP exam, where applicable.<sup>1</sup>

1 The work experience requirement ensures that individuals holding a CITP designation have the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies needed to act as an international trade professional. Successful completion of at least two of the FITTskills courses in the classroom or online exempts an individual from having to write the professional exam.

### National CITP Competency Revision Underway<sup>1</sup>

To keep FITT's Certificate, Diploma and CITP credentials relevant and meaningful to international trade practitioners, the Sector Council, in collaboration with key international trade stakeholders, is in the midst of revising its CITP competency profile, which was first developed in 1997–98.

By working closely with industry practitioners, and issuing a national survey to identify the skills and competencies needed to succeed as an international trade practitioner, FITT will be certain that its CITP competency profile reflects the current and future needs of small and medium-sized businesses and practitioners. The completed competency profile will be the foundational document from which future FITTskills training materials and certification testing will be developed. The enhancement of the CITP competency profile is not expected to change drastically the FITTskills learning objectives. Most modifications should be easily incorporated into existing learning courses and programs, although in some cases the new learning objectives will require the development of new content.

1 FITT, *FITT National C.I.T.P. Competency Revision and Gap Analysis Project*, News Release, April 15, 2005. For details, see: [www.fitt.ca/english/news\\_events.asp](http://www.fitt.ca/english/news_events.asp).

Individuals who successfully complete the FITTskills courses have the potential to immediately add value to organizations, as they bring with them a solid understanding and appreciation of what it takes to overcome international challenges and secure new business opportunities.

## A COMMITMENT TO QUALITY TRAINING AND STANDARDS

The success of the FITTskills program and the CITP designation lies in FITT's commitment to delivering relevant and accurate industry-driven curricula and to establishing national standards. With the assistance of key industry partners, FITT is able to update its training materials to ensure relevancy and currency.

FITT's dedication and commitment to deliver valued and valuable international trade training across Canada have led to several notable achievements, including:

- providing approximately 10,000 individuals across Canada with the skills, knowledge and competencies needed to excel in international trade endeavours;<sup>12</sup>
- contributing to the success of small, medium-size and large Canadian businesses in global markets; and
- acknowledging the competency and quality of international business professionals in Canada through a program of professional recognition and certification.<sup>13</sup>

## FITTSKILLS PROGRAM PARTNERS

FITT has partnerships with more than 55 public and private colleges, universities and learning institutions. Each of them is classified as either a FITTskills Delivery Partner or a FITTskills Accredited Partner.<sup>14</sup>

### DELIVERY PARTNERS

Delivery Partners are educational institutions that teach the FITTskills curriculum and administer the national FITTskills exam. There are 32 FITTskills Delivery Partners in Canada: 21 are community colleges; eight are private learning organizations or institutes, such as the British Columbia Institute for Studies in International Trade (BCISIT); and three are universities.

### ACCREDITED PARTNERS

Accredited Partners are educational institutions that offer their own international business courses and programs that have been evaluated by FITT's Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition (PLAR) process.

and deemed to meet the CITP competency profile a minimum standards for each of the FITTskills curriculum. There are 23 accredited partners in Canada, of which 18 are community colleges and three are universities.

### Fifteen colleges across Canada have developed diploma programs in International Trade and Business that are recognized by FITT.

Most of the Accredited Partners offer a host of single courses that are each recognized individually. For example, FITT and Algonquin College in Ottawa have entered into an agreement whereby the International Trade Finance course that the College offers is regarded as the equivalent of the FITTskills International Trade Finance course, and is granted an educational credit toward the CITP designation. However, there are 15 colleges across Canada that have developed 1- to 4-year diploma programs in International Trade and Business that FITT recognizes as fulfilling all of the educational requirements of the FITTskills program and CITP designation (e.g., BCISIT's International Trade and Transportation Program, Red River College's International Business Program).

The main difference for individuals taking Accredited Partner courses or programs rather than Delivery Partner programs is that they must transfer their credits to FITT and write the CITP Professional Examination.

## REQUIRED RESOURCES

Developing one's skills requires an investment of time and money. FITTskills offers two learning tracks—one for students and one for professionals. Students or individuals with little or no international trade experience are encouraged to take the more extensive program, which requires about 42 hours per course to complete. Professionals, on the other hand, are able to take an accelerated FITTskills program designed specifically to address the significant time constraints they face. Accelerated courses for professionals take approximately 14 hours, or two full days per course to complete. (See Table 1 for details.)

The cost of FITTskills courses depends on where the program is being delivered and what is included in the program offering (e.g., tuition, course material,

exam), rather than on the time required to deliver the course itself (i.e., 42 hours compared to 14 hours). For example, the Ottawa Centre for Research and Innovation (OCRI) in Ottawa—an economic agency that fosters the advancement of the region's globally competitive knowledge-based economy—charges \$540 to deliver the FITTskills program, whereas Centennial College in Toronto charges \$595, and the BCISIT in Vancouver charges \$610 per course.

Another option is to take the courses online. The cost per online course is \$445 for FITT members and \$495 for non-members. Each online course takes approximately 10 weeks to complete, but they are self-disciplined, so there is no specified time commitment. However, FITT recommends spending a minimum of 5–7 hours per week online to take full advantage of the interactions with other participants and the trainer.<sup>15</sup>

## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

One of FITT's original objectives in 1992 was to establish national standards and certification for international skills training. National standards help to ensure individuals meet a certain level of proficiency. This emphasis on quality training was, and still is, important to Canadian businesses as they move into world markets.

As noted above, FITT offers the only nationally recognized professional designation for international business professionals—CITP. This designation complements the FITTskills courses by demonstrating that

**Table 1**  
Associated Time and Cost for FITTskills Courses

| Resources                    | Professionals       | Students            |
|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Per Course</b>            |                     |                     |
| Time                         | 2 days (14 hours)   | 6 days (42 hours)   |
| Cost                         | \$575 <sup>1</sup>  | \$595 <sup>2</sup>  |
| <b>For all Eight Courses</b> |                     |                     |
| Time                         | 16 days (128 hours) | 48 days (336 hours) |
| Cost                         | \$4,600             | \$4,750             |

1 The cost shown in the table is an average of OCRI and the B.C. Institute for Studies in International Trade.

2 This cost is based on the tuition fee for Centennial College. The cost may differ for other institutions.

Source: The Conference Board of Canada.

individuals have not only the knowledge but also the skills and experience to perform at a certain level. To qualify for the CIP design, individuals must:

- complete the FITTskills program, including the national exam; or
- demonstrate equivalent knowledge through FITT's Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition process and complete the CIP Professional exam (if applicable); and
- obtain a minimum of one year international trade work experience; and
- commit to adhering to the Standards of Ethical Conduct guidelines.

FITT took business concerns about the quality and standardization of training one step further by accrediting its courses through the IATTO, an association recognized in 26 countries worldwide.<sup>16</sup> This international seal of approval adds to the program's integrity, particularly since the training is international in scope.

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## **BENEFITS TO INDIVIDUALS**

FITT participants know they are being trained to national and international standards that meet industry requirements. They can apply their knowledge in any firm engaged in international trade and are not limited to a specific sector. As well, individuals who go on to get their CIP design gain recognized credentials that prove they have solid international business skills and experience. One individual interviewed for this case study, a CIP graduate and founder of the CEI Group, noted that as recently as a few years ago the CIP design was rarely seen, and people in international trade really did not know what CIP was about. However, today he sees people promoting their designation on business cards and on name badges and presentation decks at trade shows and conferences. As well, he noted that more and more of the industry's "big players" are obtaining the designation—helping to move the program and certification to the next level of awareness and value.

FITTskills and the CIP design provide individuals with specialized knowledge, career opportunities and access to a network of hundreds of individuals working in the field of international trade and business—including importers, exporters, lawyers, financial advisors, accountants, tax experts, government officials, business owners, entrepreneurs and investors.

An employee of IBM Canada interviewed for this case study noted that it was essential to have a degree in International Business to be hired for an international trade job. However, the FITTskills program and CIP design offered her the opportunity to differentiate herself from her colleagues in order to pursue more senior positions within the company, as well as to obtain practical and relevant knowledge that could be used on a daily basis.

## **SPECIALIZED KNOWLEDGE**

The FITTskills Diploma and CIP design set individuals apart from their colleagues. According to one FITTskills graduate interviewed for this case study, now working at BioVectra: "The FITTskills program makes you an expert in international trade and related issues." This differentiation is evident in their attitude and confidence. Individuals have the capabilities to enter a workplace with little or no guidance. As one employee put it, "FITTskills gave me the confidence to do my job." This confidence brings with it an ability to carry out job responsibilities efficiently and effectively.

## **CAREER OPPORTUNITIES**

Completing the FITTskills program can also be beneficial to an individual's career. Having the CIP credential on a résumé or mentioning it in a job interview often opens doors to employers, because it is a credential that is fast gaining credibility and standing within the sector. Those who know about FITTskills and the CIP credential respect it greatly. It is only a matter of time before the majority of international trade practitioners in Canada will know about FITTskills and the CIP design.

## **NETWORKING**

Individuals gain from networking, particularly in the accelerated program, where professionals can hear from colleagues about their experiences in international trade. This sharing of best and worst practices can prove



invaluable to individuals as they encounter similar workplace experiences. Throughout their working careers, FITTskills graduates can also reconnect with their colleagues by attending FITT local meetings and events.

## BENEFITS TO EMPLOYERS

FITTskills provides businesses with valuable employees who have the skills, knowledge and abilities to help them succeed in global markets. By hiring FITTskills graduates or individuals with the CITP designation, employers know they are getting highly competent individuals with critical knowledge to help support the company's international business efforts.

Several of the benefits that individuals gain are also transferred to an organization. For instance, having these in-house credentials also helps companies differentiate themselves from their competitors. According to BioVectra—a Canadian-based biochemical manufacturer with a global outlook—"The FITTskills employee has a positive impact on our sales, marketing campaign successes and customer service." Other immediate impacts on businesses noted by case study interviewees include:

- efficient, productive and knowledgeable employees;
- increased chance of succeeding in global markets; and
- cost-effective training.

## SHORTER INTEGRATION PERIOD FOR FITTskills EMPLOYEES

Hiring FITTskills graduates can shorten the integration period or learning curve in an organization. As the Director of Marketing and Customer Service at BioVectra noted, "In our business it usually takes six months or more for a new employee without previous experience in the industry to come up to speed. The speed of integration of the FITTskills graduate is certainly above average."

This ease of integration is due in part to their familiarity with the language of international trade and areas of specific business concern. For employers looking to hire work-ready employees, FITTskills graduates are able to provide quality work in less time.

## GETTING IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

Understanding the pitfalls and knowing the best approaches to international trade can alleviate time-consuming and costly mistakes. Companies with the

right mix of knowledge, skills and experience can get it right the first time, rather than learning the hard way. This means that employers can bring their products and services to new markets faster.

For example, an interviewee at Minaean International Corporation—a Canadian-based company involved in international housing and commercial development projects—noted that the knowledge and expertise the company gained through its involvement in the FITTskills program helped it in its day-to-day business decisions by keeping it focused on critical steps and tasks. The interviewee estimated that, without FITTskills, Minaean's business activities and successes might very well have been pushed back by six months to a year. FITTskills has helped Minaean succeed in an often unpredictable and challenging international trade environment.

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## A COST-EFFECTIVE TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

FITTskills courses are generally less expensive than those offered through other professional development training providers. As well, the entire FITTskills platform of courses is offered online.

Courses can be taken individually, so companies can choose the ones that are most relevant to their needs. As one individual interviewed for the case study noted, companies can optimize their training by spreading the skills to individuals in various departments. For example, a person in marketing could take the International Marketing course, while a person in the finance department could take the International Trade Finance course. In this way, a company is able to achieve the full complement of international business skills without having the skills reside in one individual.

Indeed, FITT is already addressing the unique requirements of businesses and organizations through its EnterpriseFITT initiative—a modified version of FITTskills—which provides tailored international trade training and a flexible delivery format to meet the specific needs of a business or organization.<sup>17</sup> Although this

modified training does not lead directly to the CITP designation or the FITTskills Certificate or Diploma, it does cater to the needs of a business or organization.

## **ESTABLISHING A COMMON FOUNDATION AND LANGUAGE ON WHICH TO BUILD**

Many of Canada's small and medium-sized international businesses are made up of individuals coming from different backgrounds, with a variety of international experiences. FITTskills provides these companies with a common language and knowledge base on which to build. For example, FITTskills offers Minaean's staff the opportunity to better understand the dynamics, underpinnings and intricacies of international trade across the full spectrum of knowledge areas and occupations. For a company like Minaean, and many others, there is a real advantage in having as many of its employees as possible understand the ins and outs of international trade—it just makes good business sense. Minaean itself is a product of the FITTskills program. The company's President and Chief Executive Officer noted that five students from a FITTskills program, along with the instructor, were so impressed with each other that they joined forces to form the company. In the world of international trade and business where networks, contacts and partnerships are so important, it is little wonder that six like-minded individuals would meet through FITTskills.

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**FITTskills provides employees of diverse backgrounds with a common language and knowledge base on which to build.**

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## **KEYS TO SUCCESS**

### **1. BUILDING AWARENESS**

Although FITT started in 1992, the CITP designation became available only in 1998. This is a relatively short time for a designation to receive wide recognition. Building employers' and individuals' awareness of the CITP designation is a challenge and poses a Catch-22 for FITT. Certification is attractive to individuals when it is nationally recognized by employers. However, if employers are not aware of this certification, then individuals might question the value of attaining the CITP designation. As one FITTskills participant noted, "We need to get to the point where people say—oh, you're a CITP."

The value in FITTskills and the CITP designation is more than the letters behind the name. It is the specialized training that individuals receive that is most valued. Employers might not recognize the CITP designation, but they do recognize individuals' capabilities and performance.

Until FITTskills and its credentials become widely recognized, FITT is balancing quality and quantity.<sup>18</sup> Without question, the integrity of the program is essential, and FITT is committed to delivering high-calibre international business professionals. It also wants to address the skills shortages in this area by ensuring there is a sufficient supply of qualified people to meet industry demands.

### **2. INCREASING PARTICIPATION THROUGH NATIONAL REACH**

#### **Flexible Delivery Mechanisms in Place**

FITTskills is offered in the classroom and online. This multi-dimensional and flexible delivery system caters to the needs of a broad range of individuals who come from different backgrounds with different learning needs. One individual interviewed for this report noted that FITTskills was an appealing and attractive learning program because it was one of the first, and perhaps the only, truly interactive online international trade training programs in Canada. Being online made the learning program a flexible, convenient and viable option for this otherwise busy professional working full-time at a company.

#### **A Broad Reach with Rigorous Standards**

The FITTskills delivery model makes it available to any college, university or private learning institution in Canada. This broad reach provides opportunity for individuals from across Canada to participate in the FITTskills program and go on to obtaining their CITP designation. As more individuals enrol in FITTskills courses and receive their designation, more employers will become aware of the program and seek to take advantage of these skilled individuals.

One key to success is that checks and balances are in place to ensure that the quality of the program remains high and that national standards are adhered to. For example, everyone must take the same examination, which is marked by the same institution. No matter



where they have received their training, all participants must meet the rigorous standards established by FITT and its industry partners. Students enrolled at a college or university—with little or no previous international business experience—are offered the opportunity to engage in meaningful learning experiences tailored to their needs. Professionals and entrepreneurs are offered the opportunity to engage in an accelerated program, where their learning is designed to meet their busy schedules and take full advantage of their wealth of international trade experience.

### 3. CUSTOMIZING DELIVERY MODELS

Another example of an innovative program-delivery promotion is the partnership between the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI)—a FITTskills delivery partner—and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA). ACOA offers eligible UPEI students free tuition for the FITTskills program, and also includes a one-year internship with a local company.<sup>19</sup> Companies are offered an intern with international business skills—whose one-year internship is subsidized by ACOA.<sup>20</sup> Now in its fourth year, this partnership between UPEI and ACOA is a win-win situation for the companies, students and the region.

Students receive additional skills, knowledge and credentials at minimal cost. They also gain work experience that allows them to put their newly acquired training into practice. Businesses gain individuals with international business knowledge who can quickly integrate into their organization and be productive. An added benefit is that the region does not lose highly skilled individuals to other provinces. As one FITTskills graduate, now working for BioVectra, noted: “I was going to move to Toronto and look for a job until this opportunity presented itself. It opened a door that I didn’t even know existed.”

### 4. CUSTOMIZING TRAINING PROGRAMS LEADING TO THE PROMOTION OF FITT SKILLS

FITT and its training partners are finding innovative ways to promote modified versions of FITTskills to meet the specific needs of a sector, business or organization. Although the customized training programs do not lead directly to an individual obtaining his or her CITP designation (or FITTskills Diploma or Certificate), they do

enhance a company’s human resources capacity to successfully compete in the global economy. These programs also raise awareness of the strength and value of the FITTskills program.<sup>21</sup>

#### EnterpriseFITT

EnterpriseFITT offers tailored international trade training courses and flexible delivery formats to businesses and organizations. Working with subject matter experts, clients can clearly define their particular learning objectives, and an optimal learning process is matched to the learning needs and learning style of an organization. Through practical real-world exercises and scenarios, presentations and workshops, EnterpriseFITT caters to companies that are exporting or are export-ready, trade and industry associations, government departments and agencies involved with export and international trade.<sup>22</sup>

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#### FITTservices helps companies understand how exporting *services* differs from exporting *goods*.

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#### FITTservices

FITTservices is designed to develop the international trade skills needed for service sector employers looking to move into foreign markets. By addressing the unique challenges that service firms face—often on account of the intangible nature of the product being exported—the program helps companies understand how exporting *services* differs from exporting *goods*. FITTservices offers a continuum of integrated program materials that walks participants through the critical steps of preparing to export.

#### Going Global Workshops

FITT’s Going Global workshops offer companies the opportunity to learn about topics on international trade in order to be successful in the international marketplace. In addition, they offer individuals the opportunity to enhance their knowledge and skills in pursuit of careers in international trade. Offered online or in classrooms, the series of six Going Global workshops introduces individuals or organizations to the fundamentals of international trade, market research, marketing, trade finance, trade logistics and distribution, and to the cultural aspects of international trade.<sup>23</sup>

Should Going Global workshop participants want to expand on their international trade skills and knowledge or obtain their CITP designation, FITTskills training is the logical next step.

## **5. OFFERING RELEVANT AND HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

The quality and integrity of the FITTskills program is dependent on two critical components: the content and substance of the course materials, and the delivery of the content through experienced facilitators, instructors and trainers.

### **FITTskills Content**

FITT addresses the content of course material by collaborating with representatives of the industry to ensure it meets their needs. This demand-driven curriculum guarantees that courses are current and relevant. FITT's industry partners play a key role in both developing and updating course material. The relevance of the course material was a theme that came out time and again in interviews. An export consultant and FITTskills participant interviewed for this case study alluded to this: "The program has given me an awareness of the issues that I didn't have before. Now I know where to find the answers." He went on to state how this knowledge affects the bottom line: "I learned in a few hours what I spent three weeks trying to figure out on my own. For my customers and clients, this translates into significant savings."

The FITT program challenges preconceptions about export issues and provides a complete understanding of the complexities of international trade. It also helps individuals hone their skills and knowledge, to the benefit of clients, customers and shareholders.

In a 2004 FITT survey on the value and impact of the FITTskills program to individuals, 89 per cent of participants stated that FITTskills met their needs, and 92 per cent of participants were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with the FITTskills program overall. Additionally, of those participants who had completed a FITTskills national examination, 79 per cent were satisfied with the way the course or institution had prepared them for the examination.<sup>24</sup>

### **FITTskills Trainers, Facilitators and Instructors**

FITT plays a limited role in the actual delivery of the FITTskills program. It provides a training guide, and evaluates and accredits learning institutions' international trade courses and programs through its PLAR process, but FITT does not presently assess or train their trainers, instructors or facilitators—nor does it formally audit any of its educational partners' programs.

Although this has not been an issue to date, as all instructors and trainers have proven to be well qualified and of exceptional quality, many of the organizations and individuals interviewed for the case study pointed out the importance of the instructors and trainers to the success of the program.<sup>25</sup> The practical, real-life examples presented by trainers throughout the FITTskills courses are invaluable to the learning experience of participants.

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**Many interviewees highlighted the importance of the instructors and trainers to the success of the program.**

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FITT might consider establishing a closer relationship with its delivery partners if it wants to guarantee this high quality of teaching in the future. For example, the Project Management Institute (PMI) establishes criteria for education providers stipulating that they must offer project management training for one year and show evidence of instructor qualifications suitable to subjects being taught.<sup>26</sup> As well, the PMI randomly audits education providers' programs and conducts audits based on customer feedback. Building a more structured and formal response mechanism into the FITTskills program evaluation process—whereby students are afforded the opportunity to provide feedback on the program and instructor—would go a long way toward maintaining the quality and integrity of the FITTskills program.

#### **Trainers, Instructors and Facilitators—A Key to FITTskills Success**

Case study interviewees noted that:

- knowledgeable instructors who can answer questions are gold;
- FITT instructors with lots of experience helped them with their business plans; and
- where a FITTskills program is offered is not as important as who is teaching the individual modules.

Although the national and CITP exams ensure only qualified individuals receive credentials, there is currently no mechanism to ensure they receive high-quality training. Without this check in place, there is always the possibility that only a small percentage of FITTskills graduates will pass their exams. This would have two negative effects: first, FITTskills would receive bad publicity if participants were not satisfied with the training they had received; and second, it would limit the number of skilled international professionals in the workforce.

To date, the quality of training has been excellent. All those interviewed were impressed with the trainers and the practical experience they bring to the sessions. However, a note of caution is needed as FITT tries to broaden the reach of its program.

#### **Association of Canadian Community Colleges**

FITT works closely with numerous colleges that are Delivery Partners and Accredited Partners in the FITTskills program.

In addition, the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) has established an International Affairs Affinity Group. This Affinity Group brings together 72 colleges with an interest in the broad spectrum of international affairs to discuss common interests, ideas, challenges, best and worst practices, effective programs, advocacy concerns and recent developments. On occasion, this group also organizes joint activities to explore and promote common international affairs interests—including, for example, international business and trade.

## **CONCLUSION**

International trade will continue to be a key contributor to Canada's economic well-being. Canadian businesses require professionals with international business skills and experiences to compete in today's global economy and increase their market share. For the past 10 years, FITT has been addressing skills requirements and shortages on a national basis.

With the support of industry, government and educational institutions, FITT has developed training courses that are relevant to industry needs. They have gone on to establish national and international standards. As well, FITT offers the only nationally recognized credential for international business professionals—CITP.

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#### **A major challenge for this program is building awareness of the training and CITP designation.**

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The combination of relevant learning materials, national standards and certification makes it an effective and cost-efficient means to address the skills challenge in international business. The positive impact FITT is having on individuals and employers is evident from interviews and sector study surveys. FITTskills participants interviewed for this case study are pleased with their learning experiences. In the 2004 FITTskills survey, participants were asked if they agreed or disagreed with this statement: "FITTskills is benefiting you professionally." On a scale of 1–4 (where 1 represents "completely disagree" and 4 represents "completely agree"), the average response was 3.4, indicating strong support for the value that the program brings to individuals and, ultimately, to organizations.<sup>27</sup>

Case study participants and FITT staff agree that a major challenge for this program is building awareness of the training and CITP designation with individuals and employers. However, they are confident it will be only a matter of time before the CITP designation is widely recognized and respected in the business community.

FITTskills and the CITP designation are proof of an individual's commitment to international trade. They increase individuals' ability to tackle international tasks by covering all facets of international trade through a combination of classroom and experiential learning. Across Canada, FITTskills graduates and CITP cardholders bring a new level of expertise and accountability to the profession of international business and trade.

- 1 Statistics Canada, "Study: Export Market Participation, Innovation and Productivity Growth," *The Daily* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, December 14, 2004).
- 2 Phil Cross, "Canada's Economic Growth in Review," *Canadian Economic Observer* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, April 2005), p. 3.1.
- 3 Trade and Economic Analysis Division, *Sixth Annual Report on Canada's State of Trade* (Ottawa: Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, April 2005), p. 4.
- 4 Statistics Canada, [www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050228/d050228a.htm](http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/050228/d050228a.htm).
- 5 Statistics Canada, "Profile of Canadian Exports," *The Daily* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, February 21, 2005).
- 6 Export Development Canada, "Why Trade Is Crucial to Canada." [www.edc.ca/corpinfo/whoware/why\\_trade\\_e.htm](http://www.edc.ca/corpinfo/whoware/why_trade_e.htm).
- 7 Forum for International Trade Training brochure (Ottawa: Government of Canada).
- 8 For more information on Saskatchewan's international export economy, go to [www.ir.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp](http://www.ir.gov.sk.ca/adx/asp).
- 9 Founding partners of FITT include Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, International Trade Canada, Industry Canada, Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Canadian Federation of Labour, Canadian Association of Importers and Exporters, Canadian Professional Logistics Institute, Canadian Professional Sales Association, and World Trade Centres Canada.
- 10 IATTO represents and promotes the interests of professional institutes and selected organizations involved in the provision of international trade training and education. Established in the early 1970s, it includes members from more than 30 countries in Europe, Asia, the Americas and Africa. IATTO members learn from and share ideas with their counterparts throughout the world. For more information, go to [www.iatto.net/main.asp](http://www.iatto.net/main.asp).
- 11 Individuals may also be eligible for CIPD designation if they can demonstrate their competencies gained through work experience and/or through non-accredited FITT courses.
- 12 This figure represents the number of individuals that have taken either FITTskills or Going Global (the Going Global program is described later in this study).
- 13 Forum for International Trade Training (FITT), *Interview with the President of FITT* (Ottawa: FITT, April 2005). [www.fitt.ca/English/interview.asp](http://www.fitt.ca/English/interview.asp).
- 14 For a complete list of FITTskills Delivery Partners and Accredited Partners, go to: [www.fitt.ca/english/educationalpartners.asp](http://www.fitt.ca/english/educationalpartners.asp).
- 15 Forum for International Trade Training (FITT), *FITTskills Online* (Ottawa: FITT, April 2005). [www.fitt.ca/english/FITTskills\\_online.asp](http://www.fitt.ca/english/FITTskills_online.asp).
- 16 The International Association of Trade Training Organization's (IATTO) was officially launched in the early 1990s. Part of its mission is to set quality standards in the design, delivery and assessment of programs and initiatives geared toward international trade training and education.
- 17 Forum of International Trade Training (FITT), *EnterpriseFITT* (Ottawa: FITT, April 2005). [www.fitt.ca/english/enterprise\\_fitt.asp](http://www.fitt.ca/english/enterprise_fitt.asp).
- 18 FITT is doing much to promote and communicate the value and impact that FITTskills is having on international business and trade in Canada. In May 2005, the FITTskills Awards, which recognize excellence in international trade studies, were handed out. For details on the awards sponsored by EDC, Team Canada Inc. and Scotiabank, go to [www.fitt.ca/english/pressreleases.asp](http://www.fitt.ca/english/pressreleases.asp).
- 19 Students eligible for the program had to have a bachelor's degree and relevant experience. It was limited to 6–7 students, due to funding constraints.
- 20 ACOA covered 75 per cent of interns' salaries, up to a maximum of \$25,000.
- 21 EnterpriseFITT and FITTservices are not to be considered a replacement for any FITTskills courses. Participants must complete all eight FITTskills courses or the equivalent in order to fulfill the educational component of the CIPD requirement.
- 22 Forum for International Trade Training (FITT), *EnterpriseFITT*.
- 23 The Going Global workshops take approximately 3 hours to complete, and cost in the range of \$40–100 per workshop. Going Global—online is delivered in partnership with Team Canada Inc., and Vubiz.
- 24 FITT, 2004 FITTskills Survey, April 2005.
- 25 On the rare occasion that a problem has been found, FITT has taken corrective action by working with the institution to identify the problem.
- 26 The Project Management Institute (PMI) focuses on the needs of project management professionals by offering training, professional development, networking and career services. For instance, PMI has established accreditation standards for post-secondary degrees and master's certificates in programs focused on project management.
- 27 [www.fitt.ca/english/news\\_events.asp](http://www.fitt.ca/english/news_events.asp).





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FITT skills: Building Worldwide Opportunities in Today's Dynamic Global Economy, One Skill at a Time  
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