

TOWARDS A FULLY LITERATE CANADA

Achieving National Goals through a Comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy

A Report submitted by

**The Advisory Committee on Literacy and Essential
Skills**

**To the Minister of State for Human Resources
Development**

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* Refers to an item in The National Literacy Plan of Action attached as annex four.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On November 1st, 2005 the Minister of State for Human Resources Development appointed a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills. The Committee's mandate was "to offer the Minister of State advice informing the development of a comprehensive literacy and essential skills strategy." The Committee met three times from November 1st to 18th 2005. At its third meeting it presented this Report calling upon the Federal Government to take an immediate leadership role in the development of a comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy.

The Report

The Committee begins its Report by noting that a case for a comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy is a strong one. The Committee explains the origins of the call for this Strategy, the government's response to that recommendation, and the importance of literacy to the Government's agenda. It notes that in the recent Economic Update on November 14th, 2005, the Minister of Finance called for the development of "... a national literacy strategy with provinces and territories".

The Report then explores how important literacy is to Canada's economic, political, social and cultural survival. It explains the importance of literacy to the Government's agenda, citing examples like economic productivity, health, justice, workplace skills enhancement, Employment Insurance programming, the Framework for Action in Rural Canada, the Northern Strategy, the Agricultural Policy Framework, the Homelessness Initiative, Aboriginal policy, as well as Immigrant, Refugee and Settlement Policies to make the point.

The Face of Literacy in Canada

The Report then presents the results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) reporting that 42% of the working age adult population in Canada has literacy skills below Level 3, the international standard of literacy needed to function effectively in a modern society and economy. Between 1994 and 2003, two international surveys showed that the 42% figure is unchanged, but the number of working age Canadians with low skills has increased from 8 to 9 million due to population growth. The Report also provides a portrait of literacy in the words of adults with low literacy. Their accounts of their challenges and successes show that there is room for hope that this country can solve its literacy challenges if it can overcome the many barriers that stop people from acquiring these skills, especially as adults.

What it will take to address Canada's Literacy Needs

The Committee sifted through evidence on literacy and essential skills issues and a variety of potential solutions to them, including the results of consultations with the literacy and local communities, labour and employers. There is consensus that there is no "silver bullet" to remedy Canada's literacy situation and that the solutions required will take considerable time and resources. The conclusion the Committee drew is that the Federal Government is well placed to provide partnership-based leadership respectful of the jurisdictions of other levels of government.

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The Vision: “Towards a Fully Literate Canada”

Saying: “Leadership requires vision”, the Advisory Committee recommended that the Government of Canada adopt the following vision statement for the Strategy:

All Canadians have the right to develop the literacy and essential skills they need in order to participate fully in our social, cultural, economic and political life. Every person must have an equal opportunity to acquire, develop, maintain and enhance their literacy skills regardless of their circumstances. Literacy is at the heart of learning. A commitment to learning throughout life leads to a society characterized by literate, healthy and productive individuals, families, communities and workplaces.

This statement asserts that literacy is the foundation upon which a knowledge-based society and economy builds its future. Literacy is required by every person to develop the skills and knowledge they need to live successfully socially, culturally, economically and politically regardless of their circumstances.

Setting Goals

There was no goal set in 1994 when the first IALS survey appeared. The absence of a national strategy and the lack of an adequately funded national plan are reflected in the results: at the macro level nothing changed. So, the Committee defined what progress towards its Vision would look like by setting clear goals for the next ten years. See the text for details. Using medium projections of population growth, the Committee’s goals could result in a decrease of one million people at low levels of literacy while increasing by 3.1 million the population above level 3. If these projections are accurate, achieving the Goals could increase the percentage of working-aged people at levels 3, 4 and 5 from 58% to 65.9% and decrease the percentage below level 3 from 42% to about 34%.

The Principles

The Committee proposed seven Principles to inform the development of a Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy:

- Adopt a Broad View of Literacy
- Focus on the Learner
- Seek Community Solutions and Support Learning Communities
- Create and Support Literate Environments
- Respect Culture and Language
- Involve Stakeholders
- Measure and Report on Results

Strategic Objectives: The elements of a strategy

The Committee considers the following steps to be the essential elements in the development of a comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy. These are expressed as “Strategic Objectives” and are based on the Principles proposed in the previous section. They are suggested in sequence rather than by priority.

- Assemble the Essential Information

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- Develop and Transfer Knowledge (Research)
- Build A Quality Adult Learning System
- Address Barriers to Learning and Social Inclusion
- Provide Enhanced and Sustained Funding
- Promote Partnerships
- Expand Workplace Literacy
- Enhance Family Literacy
- Increase Public Awareness
- Develop Provincial and Territorial Partnership Accords

Conclusions and Recommendations

This is a précis of the Committee's recommendations. See the full Report for details.

1. The Government of Canada should adopt the vision statement.
2. The Federal Government should articulate a set of measurable and attainable goals as the initial ten-year objectives for the Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy.
3. A set of Principles should be adopted to inform the development of the Strategy.
4. The Federal Government should negotiate bilateral "Literacy Accords" with each of the Provinces and Territories based on the proposals in this Report.
5. The federal government should strengthen and expand the role of the National Literacy Secretariat.
6. The Federal Government should model the literacy principles and practices that it promotes in its own workplace and in clear communications with the public.
7. The Federal Government should invest in the direct delivery of literacy programmes.
8. Through these Accords the Federal Government should work with the Provinces and Territories on the establishment of a coherent national Adult Learning System.
9. The Accords should provide core, stable and sustainable funding for long-term literacy programme delivery to meet the goals for literacy mentioned above.
10. Accords should be designed to encourage and support the development of community based and locally based literacy action plans as well as community activities that encourage the development of literate environments in families, communities and workplaces.
11. The Accords should encourage horizontality across all levels of government so that the literacy issues of target groups can be met holistically and without conflicts between jurisdictions and programmes.
12. The literacy and language training needs of immigrants to Canada should be a high priority in the development and implementation of the comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy.
13. The Committee suggests the creation of a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills.
14. The Committee suggests the appointment of a Minister Responsible for Literacy and Essential Skills as an on-going Cabinet position.
15. That the Minister Responsible for Literacy appoint a Pan-Canadian Literacy Advisory Committee with the resources and capacities it needs to do research, monitor progress, and engage new partners as required to achieve this Strategy.

The Report of the Advisory Committee

INTRODUCTION

The Time for Action

“Towards a Fully Literate Canada” is the title that the Advisory Committee has adopted for its Report. This title expresses in clear language the Committee’s primary recommendation. The Government of Canada, in full partnership with the provinces and territories, should commit itself to the goal of a fully literate country by adopting, implementing and promoting a comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy.

This paper makes the case that strong and focussed leadership is required to meet Canada’s literacy challenges. Only bold action will serve the social, economic, cultural and political interests of every person who lives in our country, regardless of their circumstances.

Canadian governments know that a society that is literate and engaged reaps social and economic benefits that enrich individuals, families and communities as well as the economy upon which their prosperity depends. Literacy opens the door to increased productivity.

But ours is not a fully literate country. While we presently enjoy the rewards of an advanced knowledge-based society and economy, both of these pillars rest on a weak foundation.

On November 9th 2005, Statistics Canada reported the initial results of the International Literacy and Life Skills Survey (IALLS), the Canadian results from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) last May. Statistics Canada reported that almost 9 million Canadian adults aged 16 to 65, or 42% of the working age population, have literacy skills that are below the level required to function effectively in a knowledge-based economy and society.¹ The proportion of the working aged adult population with low literacy skills remains exactly as it was in 1994.

These flatlined statistics hide the fact that, due to population growth, there are almost 1 million more people living in Canada today with low literacy skills than there were a decade ago. When those aged 66 and over are also included, the proportion of the population with low literacy increases to nearly one-half (48%) or some 12 million persons aged 16 and older.

These findings should ring alarm bells for all Parliamentarians. These statistics have huge implications for the ability of millions of wage-earners to provide their families with the quality of life Canadians have come to assume is the norm. While the federal government has a prosperity and competitiveness agenda, and human resources are a national priority, the low literacy skills of such a significant

¹ Statistics Canada, The Daily, November 9th, 2005, The International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, see: <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/051109/d051109a.htm>

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proportion of the working aged adult population puts progress on those national priorities in doubt. These are compelling reasons for the federal government to act now.

Bluntly stated, federal, provincial and territorial governments are generally stalled on the literacy file. Some isolated initiatives have been started, for example in British Columbia and in Quebec, but there is no comprehensive integrated approach being developed to deal with Canada's literacy crisis.

The Committee proposes several bold actions. The first is to establish a compelling vision for the future of literacy in Canada. The second is to set clear goals to increase literacy skills. The third is to develop and implement a 10-year plan of action, in partnership with the provinces and territories, to reach those goals based on sound principles and realistic outcomes. Finally, there must be ways created to measure, assess and report on results.

The Need for a Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy

On November 14, 2005, the Minister of Finance delivered his Economic and Fiscal Update. In that statement he spelled out a number of broad policy directions including "Enhancing Canada's World-Class Workforce". He said that the Government is committed to:

Promote a culture of lifelong learning and skills upgrading by working with business, labour and provincial partners to enhance workplace-based skills development - including literacy, essential skills and apprenticeship.

One of the two proposed "policy actions" accompanying this particular policy direction is to "*Develop a national literacy strategy with provinces and territories*".

His statement is most welcome, echoing as it does the Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities called *Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Response*² that calls for a comprehensive national literacy strategy. It also recommended that the federal government work horizontally across departments to ensure the coherence of its policies with respect to literacy.

In 2003 the Government responded to the Standing Committee Report saying that it would:

*"Engage partners in discussions and work that could lead to a pan-Canadian strategy on literacy" and "...develop a coherent literacy policy across Government of Canada departments including establishing clear objectives, reviewing policies and programmes...and developing appropriate reporting and accountability."*³

The theme of the 2005 Federal Budget was "*Delivering on Commitments: Achieving a Productive and Sustainable Economy*". The title of the Budget referred to a number of the directions set by the Government in its October 2004

² Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, *Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Response*, June 2003.

³ Government of Canada Response to: "*Raising Adult Literacy Skills: the Need for a Pan-Canadian Response*", Queen's Printer, 2003, Catalogue number SP-598-11-03, page 11.

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Speech from the Throne (SFT). In the SFT, the Government committed itself to pursue: “a five-point strategy to build an even more globally competitive and sustainable economy”. The SFT called for the creation of: “... a new Workplace Skills Strategy, including steps to enhance apprenticeship systems and to boost literacy and other essential job skills”.⁴

With this as context, the Budget papers state that the Federal Government is committed to work with the Provinces and Territories to develop “a comprehensive strategy” in support of literacy and essential skills:

*Canada has very high rates of post-secondary education attainment. There remains, however, a relatively large number of working age Canadians who lack the literacy skills required for success in the knowledge-based economy. In recognition of the importance of improving the literacy levels of Canadians, the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development will be working with provinces, territories and stakeholders on the development of a comprehensive strategy in support of literacy and essential skills development. As an initial step, Budget 2005 invests \$30 million over three years to enhance the National Literacy Secretariat’s (NLS) capacity to further develop partnerships with provinces, territories, business and labour to foster awareness of and involvement in literacy issues and to promote learning in the workplace.*⁵

Despite these positive announcements, a comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy does not yet exist. The Advisory Committee appreciates the fact that the federal government committed supplemental resources for literacy in the last Budget. The \$30M for the National Literacy Secretariat (\$5M in 2005-06, \$10M in 2006-07 and \$15M in 2007-08) is in addition to the current NLS budget of \$30M annually.

While that is one step in the right direction, it is only one step. The road to a fully literate society will be a very long one. Canada is at the beginning of a difficult journey as this paper explains. That is why the Advisory Committee believes that the federal government must honour its commitment to the development of a Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy by taking action now.

Literacy is a Government-wide Issue

The other key recommendation of the Standing Committee was a call for a horizontal view of the connections between literacy and the various dossiers and priorities of government. The Standing Committee recommended the use of a “literacy lens” when making government policy. The reason is that literacy can be a beneficial factor in the development of effective policy on many social and economic issues. As well, decisions taken in other areas of policy can affect literacy positively or negatively, either directly or indirectly.⁶ This is an important realization for governments at all levels. To illustrate the point, one person said to the Minister of State during her consultation tour: “... *We need not only to*

⁴ *Speech from the Throne*, 38th Parliament, October 5, 2004, see <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/sft-ddt.asp>

⁵ Supplementary Information and Notice of Ways and Means, *The Budget Plan 2005*, Department of Finance, 2005, p. 123.

⁶ Statistics Canada and OECD, *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society*, Ottawa and Paris, 1997, P. 107.

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increase literacy to reduce poverty, but we also need to reduce poverty in order to increase literacy.”

There are many examples of policy areas that are literacy sensitive and that respond well to a literacy lens. The administration of justice serves as one illustration. On November 10, 2005 the Federal, Provincial and Territorial governments announced the renewal of the **National Crime Prevention Strategy** to address the root causes of crime. Canada's prison population has a lower level of literacy than the general population.⁷ This suggests a role for literacy training in crime prevention and in the rehabilitation of offenders.

Similarly, literacy and health care are interconnected. **Achieving Health for All: A Framework for Health Promotion** notes: “disadvantaged groups have a significantly lower life expectancy, poorer health and a higher prevalence of disability than the average Canadian”. Health Canada has identified literacy as a determinant of health, and literacy skills are critical to understanding health prevention information, the use of medications, and comprehension of the elements of a healthy diet.

Without attempting to provide an exhaustive list, the Committee has identified some other examples of policies, programmes or initiatives of the federal government that relate to literacy. They illustrate the need for horizontal coordination.

A central platform of Canada's **productivity and prosperity** agenda is the transfer of skills and knowledge to workers in Canadian enterprises, both big and small. An economic agenda must focus on enhancing the literacy skills of the workforce so that it is ready to learn, be trained, and use and apply new knowledge. The transferability and the portability of skills are essential, both for the individual worker but also to enhance the productivity of both firms and the country. The strategies cannot simply focus on the highly educated. Initiatives such as the **Workplace Skills Strategy** and the **Employment Insurance Program** must include a focus on enhancing literacy skills to a much greater extent.

Assumptions with respect to a highly literate population underpin the **Federal Framework for Action in Rural Canada**. This Framework sees citizens and communities benefiting from a knowledge-based society and economy and making informed decisions about their own futures. Many rural and remote communities have lower levels of literacy than more urban communities. The Framework's goals will not be reached unless the literacy needs of these communities are addressed.

Similarly the **Northern Strategy**, which the federal, territorial and Aboriginal governments are working on with Northerners, is based on a people and community centred approach. The Strategy is designed to establish a strong support base for economic and community development grounded in the human capacity that is resident in the North. Literacy is an essential ingredient.

⁷ “Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for A Pan-Canadian Response,” Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (Ottawa: Communication Canada Publishing, 2003), P. 58

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The **Agricultural Policy Framework** (APF) is a comprehensive federal-provincial-territorial initiative with five key components: business risk management; food safety and food quality; science and innovation; environment; and renewal. Strong literacy skills will be required to achieve the economic enhancement of the sector, to strengthen agriculture-based communities and companies, and guarantee the safety of the broader public.

While there are many reasons why so many Canadians are homeless, the lack of literacy and essential skills pose a significant barrier to increasing the fortunes of many homeless people. The **National Homelessness Initiative**, which supports community-based solutions, has at its heart, attention to the enhancement of literacy skills.

Keeping Canadians Safe calls for individual attentiveness to public safety and preparedness for emergencies. The strategy assumes that all Canadians will be able to use written materials of a complex nature to develop their own emergency action plans, respond to emergencies and care for the injured, amongst other objectives. Literacy is an essential component in this kind of self-sufficiency.

The **Framework for the First Nations and Inuit Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effects Initiative** seeks both to integrate literacy into their capacity building strategies and to take FAS/FAE into account with respect to the design and delivery of literacy programmes.

Recently, data on Canada's literacy performance from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) released by Statistics Canada shows that the literacy skills of immigrants are significantly lower, on average, than the literacy skills of the total population. This is not to suggest that these people are not literate in their mother tongues, but rather, that they may need help acquiring skills in French or in English in order to be able to participate fully in our society and economy.

It is essential that Canada's **Immigration, Refugee and Settlement Policies and Programs** provide support for the delivery of literacy skills programmes for business class, skilled workers or family class immigrants. In addition, language and settlement program supports have historically placed a priority on the primary wage earners to the neglect of other family members. Many long-time settled immigrants have not had the access to language programs to enable their participation in the wider society, indeed many may have mother tongue literacy barriers which further inhibit their English or French language acquisition. Without one of the official languages they are not eligible for citizenship. Socially and economically this is unfair. With major immigration expansion plans announced, these challenges will be even greater for the country

These examples illustrate the importance of a literacy policy lens to the Government of Canada. Just as there is a need for leadership in the development of a Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy, there also is a need for action by the federal government to do more to integrate literacy into policies and programmes across its departments and agencies.

THE FACE OF LITERACY IN CANADA

This section of the Committee's report begins by describing the Committee's understanding of what literacy means in a modern society and economy. It then introduces the most recent statistics on adult literacy levels in Canada. The Committee then introduces the real face of literacy in Canada through the words of those who have struggled to learn how to read and write as adults. Finally, this section looks at a number of the barriers that prevent people with low literacy from taking training to enhance their skills.

Understanding literacy

In its basic form, literacy is about learning to read and write (text and numbers), reading and writing to learn, and developing these skills and using them effectively for meeting basic needs.⁸ Definitions of literacy commonly refer to the skills used in everyday life or to those that allow one to function competently in society.

The types of skills demanded in societies and economies around the globe are in flux. Economic globalization, advances in information and communications technology and the move towards knowledge-based societies present new opportunities for some, but unfortunately exclude others, even in our own society.⁹ These changes have compelled us to rethink what we mean by literacy.

Consequently, views of what literacy is have become broader, moving away from the narrow notion of the ability to read and write, to include numeracy and the application of knowledge in problem solving. This new thinking is the basis for the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey or ALLS. The ALLS approach provides an assessment of Canada's progress against international benchmarks. Such surveys are important and Canada should continue to support them.

The point is that the Committee recognizes that literacy is fluid and will continue to evolve. People acquire and use literacy for different purposes in different circumstances. There are many literacy practices that are embedded in social, political, and cultural processes, personal circumstances and socio-economic structures.¹⁰

Rather than seeing literacy as a fixed set of generic and technical skills (as is the case for basic literacy) UNESCO has adopted the concept of "plural literacy". This view looks at the ever-shifting social dimensions of the acquisition, continued development and changing uses of literacy. It emphasizes that literacy is not uniform but culturally and linguistically diverse. The evidence is found in the existence of different scripts or alphabets, different languages, different registers and genres, as applied to different social practices, all of which change with time and place.¹¹

⁸ International Council for Adult Education, *Agenda For the Future: Six Years Later*, a presentation to CONFITEA+6, a UNESCO review conference on Adult Education and Literacy held in Bangkok, Thailand from September 8-11, 2003.

⁹ Denise Lievesley and Albert Motivans, *Taking Literacy Seriously* (Paris: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2000) <http://www.ius.unesco.org>.

¹⁰ UNESCO Education Sector Position Paper, *Literacy-Multiple Meanings and Dimensions*, (Unpublished), P. 2-3.

¹¹ *Ibid.* P. 8.

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This view of literacy as an evolving set of skills is not abstract. It is, in fact, very real. The Committee believes that this plural view of literacy is important for Canada because of the diversity of our linguistic and cultural mix. We have two official languages, an official policy of multiculturalism (including encouragement of “heritage languages”), and 641 First Nations communities consisting of 52 indigenous cultural groups speaking approximately 50 languages, many of which are either under pressure or threatened with extinction.¹² In addition, among the Inuit there are several dialects within Inuktitut, and the Métis people speak a variety of First Nations languages such as Cree, Ojibwa or Chipewyan, as well as Michif, which evolved out of their mixed ancestry.¹³

The recognition that literacy is culturally specific and socially connected is therefore critically important for Canada if we are to make progress in lifting our literacy rates. One might argue that Canada is one of the first “plural literacy” nations in the world, whether Canadians realize it or not.

A Statistical Portrait of Literacy in Canada

The need for a Pan-Canadian Strategy is amply demonstrated in the just-released results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, or ALLS. The picture that it paints of literacy in Canada demonstrates how urgent the situation has become.

To set the context, The International Adult Literacy Survey undertaken in Canada in 1994 found that a significant number of Canadian adults (aged 16 to 65) had low-level literacy skills. The International Adult Literacy Survey examined three forms of literacy:¹⁴

- *Prose Literacy* – the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts like editorials, news stories, poems and fiction;
- *Document Literacy* – the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables and graphics; and
- *Quantitative Literacy* – the knowledge and skills required to apply arithmetic operations, either alone or sequentially, to numbers embedded in printed materials: balancing a chequebook, calculating a tip, completing an order form or determining interest on a loan from an advertisement.

A numerical scale was developed for each type of literacy and scored from 0 to 500. Five levels of skill were identified for each of the three forms of literacy. Level 1 was the lowest (0-225) followed by level 2 (226-275), Level 3 (276-325), level 4 (326-375) and level 5 the highest (376-500).

¹² “Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for A Pan-Canadian Response,” Report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (Ottawa: Communication Canada Publishing, 2003), P. 28.

¹³ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *People to People, Nation to Nation*, Volume 1, Chapter 2. Introduction.

¹⁴ Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*, Ottawa, 1996, pages 10-11.

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Level 3 (276-325) is the level the OECD and Statistics Canada consider to be the minimum required to be able to function effectively in a modern society and economy.

On May 11th 2005, the results from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) were released. This report presents an initial set of findings covering Canada, Bermuda, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, the United States and the Mexican State of Nuevo Leon.

During 2003 the survey tested more than 23,000 Canadians on their skills proficiency in four scales: prose, document, numeracy and problem solving. The prose and document scale remained unchanged from the 1994 study, and are comparable, so progress can be measured. However, the old quantitative scale was altered to increase its reliability as a measure and was renamed as Numeracy. So it is not directly comparable with the 1994 results. As well, a new scale was created called *Problem Solving*. Since it is new, it is not comparable to the 1994 survey.

ALLS found that the average literacy score for Canadians had not changed significantly during the nine-year period since IALS. On the prose scale, the average score in 1994 was 278.8 and in 2003 it was 280.8, a difference of 2 points. In 1994, 42% of the working aged adult population was at levels one and two on the IALS prose scale, below the international standard of level 3. In 2003 the percentage of the population at these levels on the prose scale was unchanged.

In 1994 however, 42% represented about 8 million Canadians; in 2003 42% had grown to represent close to 9 million Canadians due to population growth. Three provinces, Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia have, in total, 7 million of the 9 million persons with low literacy.

Overall, 58% of the total population has average document literacy scores at Level 3 or above. These are people who meet or exceed the international standard. If one looks only at those who are employed, the figure rises to about 62%. This is a strong base upon which to build as will be explained later.

In contrast, over half of unemployed Canadians have literacy scores below Level 3. At the same time, some 15% of Canadians, about one out of every seven adults of working age, scored within the level one range (1-225), the lowest performance level. This was down slightly from 17% in 1994, a 2% drop that is not statistically significant. In population terms it means that 3.1 million Canadians aged 16 to 65 have problems dealing with printed materials and most likely identify themselves as people who have difficulty reading.

There is some good news to be found in comparing these survey results:

- The average prose and document scores for Canada were at level 3 at 280.9 for prose and 286.6 for document literacy.
- There was a noticeable positive change in average scores among the bottom 5% of adults at level 1.

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- The average prose scores for Yukon, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Nova Scotia were not different from the average scores for Norway and Bermuda, the top scoring countries in 2003.
- The average *literacy* scores of all provinces were at level 3, except for Quebec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Nunavut. The average *numeracy* scores for all provinces were at level 3, except for New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador and Nunavut.
- Quebec raised its average prose scores from 264.1 to 275.3, an increase of 11.3 average points, from 1994 to 2003. This is a statistically significant increase.
- In most provinces and territories, the majority of youth have prose literacy proficiency at Level 3 or above.

However there is also some bad news.

- More than 80% of seniors scored at levels 1 and 2 in prose literacy. Proficiency tends to decrease with age beginning at about 55 years.
- Four provinces and territories have averages at level 2 on all three domains (prose, document and numeracy) – Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Quebec and Nunavut. However, except for Nunavut, the averages are very close to the cut off for level 3.
- Five provinces and territories have scores for Numeracy at level 2 though their average scores for literacy are at level 3. These are Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba and the Northwest Territory.
- Nine out of 13 jurisdictions have about 50 % their population with numeracy below level 3, or close to 8 million people. This “hidden numeracy problem” is particularly challenging because of our lack of capacity for adult numeracy compared to adult literacy programming. Two and a half million people had both literacy and numeracy below level 3.
- The prose literacy performance of the Aboriginal populations surveyed is lower than that of the total Canadian population. Younger Aboriginal people have higher scores than older ones but all age groups score lower than non-Aboriginal people.
- The proportion of Francophones with low literacy is higher than the proportion of Anglophones with low literacy. The exception is Quebec where there are no significant differences in prose literacy proficiency between Francophones and Anglophones at the same level of educational attainment.
- Overall, immigrants of work age performed significantly below the Canadian born population.
- Recent immigrants (10 years or less) and established immigrants (more than 10 years) have the same average score in all four domains and have the same proportion scoring below level 3 in all four domains.

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- Immigrants whose mother tongue was neither English nor French have lower average scores in all four domains compared to immigrants whose mother tongue is one of the two official languages.
- There are 972,000 Canadians at level 1 who are either unemployed or employed but earning low income. There are 1,649,000 at level 2 who are either unemployed or employed but earning low income. Together they total 2,621,000 Canadians who are in the most need of literacy assistance.

These are simply highlights but they tell us several important things. First, Canada has a solid base from which to build its literacy future. We do perform well in a number of respects.

Second, these ALLS data tell us that we will have serious challenges reaching the 2.2 million adults with low literacy who are not in the labour force because workplace programmes cannot aid those outside of the workforce. This means that community-based literacy programmes and public institutions must be effective in reaching these people.

Third, the data points to the importance of the literacy skills of Canada's immigrant population. Of the 9 million people in Canada with low literacy skills, 2.6 million of them are immigrants. Two million of them are in the labour force although 240,000 of them are unemployed. There are 650,000 who are not in the labour force at all.

Overall, immigrants of working age performed in French or in English at a level significantly below the Canadian born population. Many of these people are highly literate in their native languages; they simply may not have had the time nor the opportunity to develop sufficiently high literacy skills in one or other of Canada's Official Languages. Solving the Official Language literacy issues of immigrants must be a key priority in any strategy.

The data suggest that as our immigration levels increase more effective measures will have to be put in place to assist newcomers in acquiring the literacy skills they need in either Official Language. Since a high proportion of newcomers come to Canada with post-secondary training, getting them integrated into the economy and society as quickly as possible should be a priority.

Their professional or trades skills risk being underutilized if they are not literate in one or other of our Official languages. To be effective, literacy interventions must begin immediately on arrival, not six months or a year later, to begin to equip them with the skills they require. If we wait too long, they lose whatever skills they had and they go into jobs below their level of educational qualification where they don't use their skills and have further losses.

There are more details provided on the ALLS findings in the section in this report entitled "Setting Goals".

The Voices of Literacy in Canada

Statistics cannot convey what it is like to live in our country without literacy skills, or with skills that are so low that you feel your life chances are limited. To understand what the reality of low literacy means to an ordinary Canadian, read on:

“People are unemployed, are poor, are addicted, are ripped off and are discriminated against because they can't read. People get in trouble with Revenue Canada, employment insurance and other government programs because they can't read. People are in jail because they can't read. I know that people die because they can't read.

I know that government is sympathetic to literacy and government gives a lot of support. But literacy programs need help reaching all of those Canadians who do not read or read well. Forty seven percent of Canadians have had the same problems I've just talked about. You might think that you can't afford more for literacy. But... if you think literacy is expensive...try ignorance.”

These are the words that Dorothy Silver used to conclude her message on Literacy Action Day, February 18, 1999. She spoke on Parliament Hill almost seven years ago. She is still waiting for a reply.

A common misconception is that a person with low literacy is not an achiever. Nothing is further from the truth. Very recently, one of the icons of Canadian hockey, Jacques Demers, the former coach of the Montreal Canadiens, revealed that he had lived his life of public acclaim and professional success in deep personal suffering and doubt because of his lack of literacy skills. As he put it:

“Nobody can ever hurt me again. Nobody can fire me now... for all those years I had at the back of my mind that I could be fired, I could be embarrassed, I could be humiliated... There is no way they were going to hire someone who says he is an illiterate”.

Jacques Demers is an exceptional person. But his story is one of many and the Advisory Committee believes that these voices must be heard at the Cabinet table.

Although he does not have the stature of an NHL coach, Gary Porter from Midhurst Ontario is also an achiever. Gary is the National Student Representative on the Laubach Literacy of Canada's Board of Directors and he also sits on the Board of his provincial literacy body, is involved in local student activities and won a 2003 Canada Post Literacy Award for Individual Achievement. This is what literacy means to him in his own words:

“Learning to read and write has changed my life in so many different ways that I find it hard to grasp sometimes. I can now read to my grandchildren. I can read a novel with ease. I have learned to pronounce words correctly... I have become more descriptive in my speaking and my writing. I am no longer embarrassed to ask for help.

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Work has also become much more fulfilling. Now that I am more confident with writing invoices, dealing with customers, ordering materials, problem-solving and using the computer on a daily basis, I have earned the respect of my family. They have given me a voice in company decisions and I have become an equal partner with my brother and my father (in the family's glazier business)."

There are other accounts that show the powerful things people can do when they increase their literacy skills. Lynda Richards writes:

My life has changed dramatically for the good. I believe I am a good role model for my daughter and grandchildren. I am also proud to say that I own and operate two businesses. I have a staff of 6 people. I have learned to do my own books. Through my business I have assisted in teaching commercial cooking to high school students. I have had the chance to teach short order cooking to two adults in cooperation with employment programs in my community.

Those who work with learners know better than most the challenges that people with low literacy face. They also know what learners can accomplish. These are the words of literacy practitioners at Parkdale Project Read:

"We serve one of the most culturally diverse communities in Toronto. The learners who attend our program come from all backgrounds, culturally, economically and socially. We also serve learners who identify as psychiatric/consumer survivors. The life experiences that are barriers to our students' learning include violence, trauma, socio-economic barriers, mislabelling, racism, lack of support from the community or traditional school system and inadequate support for all forms of disabilities.

Although there is no 'typical' literacy learner, many are in low paying jobs or on social or disability assistance, they have overcome incredible obstacles, including deep rooted shame, in order to get to our program. Many learners who enter our program stay, but some find it difficult to continue. We have found that providing a supportive learning environment that recognizes the effects of trauma on learning, and does not stigmatize learners for their life experiences, has a profound impact on learners' ability to stay in the program and learn successfully."

This theme of non-judgmental encouragement accompanied by quality teaching has impacts everywhere in the country. Rita Buffalo is currently the Literacy Coordinator of the Anishnawbe Skills Development Program at the Thunder Bay Indian Friendship Centre (TBIFC) and graduated from that programme as a learner herself.

She had been through several foster homes and group homes, and was on the road to self-destruction, "*with no education to speak of*", as she puts it. Rita had been doing community service hours at the TBIFC, when she noticed a group working and having fun every day. They were attending the Centre's literacy class. Eventually, her curiosity led her to speak with the learners and then to enroll in the program. As a learner, Rita gained a positive cultural identity, learned that she could learn, and went on to make the Dean's List at Confederation

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College. Now she develops culture-based, real-life programming for learners at the TBIFC Literacy Program. Rita has won the 2003 Canada Post Literacy Award in the Individual Achievement Category for Ontario. She is giving back.

“I used to write long, saucy letters to management. Now I write short, saucy letters to them,” laughs Terry Bennett. He writes about his experience in a workplace literacy programme:

I saw this program as an opportunity to refresh my own literacy skills, which I learned some 30 years ago. As a union activist I am involved in many aspects of the workplace. This course seemed like a good idea and it was.

Terry says that in his own class people were so excited that once they got started they came early, left late, and attended in the summer on their own time.

These final quotations explain what an increase in literacy can do for self-confidence and motivation for both the young and the old among us.

“I was once a runaway. I had an anger that no one could even control. I didn’t know how to talk to people. I didn’t get a chance to finish school... Now that I am back in school, going to the literacy program, I am very happy. I have awesome teachers. I can talk to people better and I know that I can fulfill my dreams.”
Sokamphaek (21 years old)

I decided to go to the literacy program for myself and set a good example for my children. I don’t want them to do what I did. I want them to have a good education and a good life. The literacy program is helping me to be a better mom.
Sothea (22 years old)

I have been to school for 7 months now. I was very scared at the beginning. But now I feel happy from the bottom of my heart. Everyday, I learn new words and new things. Going to school keeps me away from my worries and brings me peace of mind.
Tony (75 years old)

These are the words of those who know from first hand experience what a challenge low literacy and illiteracy can be. Their words express their shame, their courage and their accomplishments. These are the words of our fellow citizens.

The Hidden Face of Literacy

One difficult challenge is that so few people with low literacy come forward for assistance. Estimates vary, but a major study done by ABC CANADA[®] in partnership with Literacy BC¹⁵ tells us that only a small fraction (estimates range from 5 to 10%) of eligible adults have ever enrolled in literacy or skills upgrading programmes. Among those who enroll dropout rates are high, around 30%.

The ABC study suggests that the reasons for not enrolling, or for dropping out, range from lack of financial support, to job-related conflicts, to family responsibilities, to lack of financial and social supports such as childcare. There are also issues around confidence and self-esteem. Addressing these issues must be part of a comprehensive strategy.

¹⁵ ABC CANADA Foundation, “Patterns of Participation in Canadian Literacy and Upgrading Programmes”. Published in 2001.

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Canadians who cannot, or choose not to, attend literacy training programs still have the right to vote and to have a voice and role in their communities. They need to provide financial and other support for their children, and to take care of their families' health. **We can prevent systemic barriers from holding less-literate Canadians back from contributing to and benefiting from Canadian society. The committee recommends a federal policy mix - and a system of interdepartmental cooperation - that supports both social inclusion and access to learning.**

WHAT IT WILL TAKE TO ADDRESS CANADA'S LITERACY NEEDS

This paper provides an overview of the problems identified by the literacy community, employers and unions as well as the solutions these groups propose for a comprehensive national literacy strategy. The paper also incorporates work done by the seven national literacy organizations¹⁶ on their National Literacy Plan of Action. The Committee endorses the plan and the logic model accompanying it.

The Results of Public Consultations

The Minister of State for Human Resources Development and HRSDC developed a consultation process to involve the literacy community, employers and unions in the identification of issues and solutions as a first step in the design of a Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy.

Community consultations were held in seventeen communities from coast-to-coast from early July to late September 2005, involving close to 450 people. They represented literacy coalitions, literacy providers, community groups, labour unions, the private sector, school boards, community colleges and universities as well as provincial and municipal governments. The document entitled: *Canadians Speak About Literacy and Essential Skills* provides a synthesis of what Minister Bradshaw heard. It is attached as annex one. The key messages from the community included:

- Progress is possible if we treat literacy not as a single issue but as a series of related problems, each with its own solution.
- The needs of specific groups such as Aboriginal Canadians, immigrants, persons with disabilities, equity groups, linguistic minorities, rural and isolated communities, seniors and youth at risk must be examined and dealt with appropriately.
- A national literacy strategy should not only address the needs of workers in their workplaces but also the needs of the unemployed and of those outside of the workforce especially through family literacy interventions.
- Literacy objectives should be economic but also social, cultural or personal. "...We need to see literacy not only as a means for employment but also as a means for a better life".

¹⁶ The Movement for Canadian Literacy, ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation, La Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français, Frontier College, Laubach Literacy of Canada, The National Adult Literacy Database and the National Indigenous Literacy Association.

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- Literacy organizations lack secure, predictable core funding to sustain both community-based and workplace literacy programmes. Teaching literacy to adults cannot be dependent on short-term project funding if it is to be effective in meeting the long-term needs of learners. Contributions funding was consistently viewed as counterproductive.
- There is a need for greater literacy policy coherence at both the federal and provincial/territorial levels of government and between all levels of government, including municipalities.
- There is a need to renew and to expand a crumbling literacy infrastructure. In many communities adults are being taught in inadequate learning conditions that make the acquisition of basic skills even more difficult.
- The literacy teaching profession is at risk and lacks adequate training, certification, remuneration and curricula. There is also a need for enhanced literacy research.
- The working poor and those on welfare often do not have the kinds of transportation and childcare supports they need to access literacy programmes.
- Small and medium-sized enterprises, or SME's, generally lack the capacity, funding, and time needed to provide literacy or other skills training to employees. They are, collectively, our largest employer.

The second part of the engagement strategy involved consultations with representatives of both the labour movement and employers. Departmental officials met with representatives of both labour and business during a series of meetings held in various parts of the country during September 2005. Separate reports on these discussions are appended as annexes two and three.

Key issues raised at the employer roundtables included:

- Canada needs to create an effective marketing and communications plan relative to essential skills. Literacy and essential skills are not “buzz words,” the consultations concluded, and employers need to know more about these skills and their impact on business performance.
- Employers want HRSDC to create tools to help employers make training decisions and measure returns on training investments.
- Employers want tools to evaluate not only the skills content of jobs but also the essential skills held by individual employees for all nine essential skills.
- They called on governments to reduce red tape to make it easier for employers to apply for money to develop workers skills.
- Employers called for incentives, for example through the tax system or through differential EI premiums, to encourage employers to invest in skills training.
- Employers called for all levels of government to coordinate essential skills activities.

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- They recommended ways to leverage existing community and industry resources.
- They wanted assurances that SME's receive special attention in any training strategies.
- They called for improvements to the way that people make the transition between the education system and the workplace.

At the roundtables with labour the following issues, among others, were raised.

- A broad holistic approach to literacy has to be adopted to encompass the needs of both the employed and unemployed, the diversity of Canadian workplaces, and the skills needs not only for jobs but also of people in the wider community.
- Sustainability of funding for literacy, skills training and programme coordination is critical. The federal government needs to move beyond pilot projects, assessment tools, testing, information kits, profiles and consultations to taking action. Both the amount and the mechanisms for funding were questioned.
- Partnerships involving employers, labour and government are essential at the federal, provincial and workplace levels.
- Government should use some of the tools available to it to deliver a national training strategy such as the Canada Labour Code, the Labour Market Development Agreements and the use of EI funds.
- A well-funded public education system that encompasses the needs of adult learners in both the community and the workplace is required.
- The federal government must ensure that funds for literacy and essential skills go to only public and non-profit trainers.
- There is a need for increased support for literacy and essential skills linked to support for apprenticeship training and the trades.

These three reports are congruent and suggest that a number of sectors are in broad agreement about what Canada requires with respect to literacy and essential skills. These comments and suggestions are in line with the vision statement explained below.

Proposals Drawn from the National Literacy Plan of Action

The Committee endorses the "National Literacy Plan of Action" designed to provide direction to government on what is needed to achieve the vision of a fully literate Canada. The Plan has been an important part of the Committee's deliberations and the Principles and Strategic Objectives sections of this Report build on it. This ten-year results-based plan is attached as annex four and more will be said about it later in this document in the section entitled Strategic Objectives. The "logic model", designed to accompany the national plan, provides initial thinking on deliverables, indicators, and staging. It is annex five.

THE VISION – A FULLY LITERATE CANADA

The case for a comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy is a strong one. This paper has explained the origins of the call for a Pan-Canadian Strategy, the government's response to that recommendation, the importance of literacy to the Government's agenda, the results of three sets of consultations on the future of literacy, and provided an initial review of the results of the 2005 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey and compared them to Canada's results from the IALS study a decade earlier.

The Committee believes now is the time for the Government of Canada to play a leadership role to advance literacy in this country. Leadership requires vision, one that inspires all sectors of this society to work together to solve our literacy challenges. The Advisory Committee recommends the Government of Canada adopt this statement:

“Towards a Fully Literate Canada”

All Canadians have the right to develop the literacy and essential skills they need in order to participate fully in our social, cultural, economic and political life.

Every person must have an equal opportunity to acquire, develop, maintain and enhance their literacy skills regardless of their circumstances.

Literacy is at the heart of learning. A commitment to learning throughout life leads to a society characterized by literate, healthy and productive individuals, families, communities and workplaces.

This vision reiterates what we have long known, that literacy is the key to learning and is the starting point for the development of the workforce and workplace skills every modern economy requires. By adopting this statement the Government of Canada would assert that literacy is the foundation upon which a knowledge-based society and economy builds its future. It would be stating clearly that literacy is the basis upon which every person develops the skills and knowledge required to navigate successfully socially, culturally, economically and politically throughout their lives regardless of their circumstances. It would be a commitment to a fully literate Canada while responding to the needs of the vulnerable.

This is the reason why governments that aspire to economic leadership are addressing the literacy needs of their people. In ways unique to each of them, countries such as Australia, England, Norway, the Republic of Ireland, and Sweden are striving to achieve increases in the literacy of their populations. They realize what is at stake.

But literacy is about more than competitive advantage and productivity, important though those objectives are. Literacy is also a fundamental ingredient in a functioning democracy because citizens need to be informed about and engaged in the issues facing them. Literacy skills encourage the free exchange of ideas and critical discourse. In addition literacy enriches societies and cultures, and encourages community participation as well as cultural expression and enjoyment.

SETTING GOALS

In addition to a Vision of a fully literate country, it is important to define what progress towards that Vision will look like, what we want to achieve and how we will measure progress in specific terms.

Setting goals is not an abstract process. Goals are established in order to generate commitment and to sustain effort. The Advisory Committee believes that national goals must be an integral part of the Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy. Since international assessments are being taken every ten years, this set of goals proposes what Canada's literacy profile should be in 2016.

It is important to note that the Advisory Committee is proposing these goals with the full knowledge that Canada does not have the current capacity to reach these targets. We do not have a comprehensive view of what literacy training capacity currently exists in community-based programmes, public programmes and workplace programmes or in programmes for immigrants. We do not have adequate information on how much the provinces and territories spend on literacy.

As well, given the fact that moving a country's literacy profile will take more than a generation, which is usually defined as 20 years, the Committee recognizes that attaining its proposed goals in ten years time will not solve Canada's literacy problems, far from it. However, by setting and achieving these goals Canada will put itself on a course "towards a fully literate society".

Setting goals is a legitimate exercise if it triggers efforts to create public policy, marshal resources, build capacity, spark research and inform the public. All of these activities will be required to realize these goals and must, therefore, be part of any national strategy.

The Rationale for these Specific Goals

The Committee's proposed goals are based on its examination of Canada's performance on both the 1994 IALS and the 2003 ALLS reports. Level 3 on the IALS and ALLS prose and document scales is considered the skills level required to function effectively in a modern society and economy. Getting more people to level 3 or higher is the objective. People at this level are able to manage their own learning, usually train more and have more access to employer funded learning, and earn enough to invest in their skills themselves if they wish to do so. These are substantial indirect benefits from higher levels of literacy.

The working aged adult population in 1994 was 18.4 million persons and it grew to 21.4 million by 2003, an increase of 3 million people. As suggested earlier, because of population growth, there were some shifts in literacy results when expressed in population terms rather than as percentages. For example, the fact that 58% were at level 3 and above in both the 1994 and the 2003 Surveys, hides the fact that the population at these levels increased from 10.8 million in 1994 to 12.4 million in 2003, up 1.6M.

All of the growth came at level 3, rising from 36.4% in 1994 to 38.6% in 2003. Our performance at levels 4/5 decreased in percentage terms from 22.3% (or 4.2 million in 1994) to 19.5 % (or 4.1 million in 2003). In population terms the number

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of Canadians at levels 4/5 declined by 100,000. This decrease may seem small, but the downward trend is troubling because a knowledge-based economy cannot afford to lose its most highly skilled workers.

As mentioned earlier, those below level three are people whose skills are considered insufficient for a knowledge-intensive economy and society. The number of people at level one has stayed the same despite population growth. The absolute number of people at level one remains at 3.1 million persons. This reflects the fact that while the overall population grew the percentage of the population at this level declined from 16.6% to 14.6%, a drop that is not statistically significant. The number of people at level two increased both in percentage terms (from 24.8% to 27.3%) and in absolute numbers (from 4.6 million to 5.8 million).

It is important to note that the number of people at levels 3, 4 and 5 grew in number from 10.8 million to 12.4 million for a 1.6 million increase. The number of people with low literacy (levels 1 and 2) increased from 7.8 million to 8.9 million, a rise of 1.1 million. That means that we have been achieving literacy improvements at a rate slower than population growth. That has to change.

The Goals Explained

There was no goal set in 1994 when the first IALS survey appeared. The lack of a clear goal, the absence of a national strategy and the lack of an adequately funded national plan is reflected in the results. At the macro level virtually nothing changed.

The next international survey, the Committee assumes, will take place in 2013 or 2014, and it will provide us with another assessment of performance. Rather than relying simply on hope that Canada will do better, the Committee recommends that clear goals be established.

ALLS Literacy Level	Current situation based on 2003 data	Proposed Ten-Year Goal
4/5	19.5%	Increase to 21%
3	38.6%	Increase to 45%
2	27.3%	Decrease to 24%
1	14.6%	Decrease to 10%

This table graphically and simply displays the Committee's recommendation, which is to shift the whole literacy spectrum upwards with goals set for every level of skill.

The Committee proposes that Canada commit to changing the proportion of people at level one, from the current 14.6% to 10%. Even without a plan, Canada experienced a 2% drop over the last nine years. While that difference was not statistically significant, it showed a trend in the right direction. The Committee proposes more than doubling that percentage decline to 4.6%.

Next, the Committee proposes a change in the proportion of people at level 2 from 27.3% to 24%. Canada experienced a 2.5 % rise in the proportion of people at

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this level during the last 9 years, growing from 24.8% to 27.3%. This proposal is to reverse the negative trend at level 2 by 2015 to achieve some improvement over the position Canada occupied in 1994.

The Committee suggests increasing the percentage at level 3 from 38.6 to 45%. We experienced a 2.5% increase in the last ten years, and the Committee proposes that Canada should try to more than double that positive performance.

Finally, the Committee proposes increasing the percentage at levels 4/5 from 19.5% to 21%. We experienced a 2.8% drop from 1994 to 2003. We need to recover that ground and 1.5% should do it, given population projections.

The Goals Expressed in Population Terms.

Statistics Canada projects that the Canadian population aged 16 to 65 will grow by 2.1 million people over the next decade using medium growth projections based on 2000 population estimates. If Canada's literacy performance remains unchanged by 2016 with 42% of working aged adults below level 3 that would mean that the population with low literacy skills in Canada would increase from close to 8.9 million to almost 9.9 million people.

So without a change in policies and investments, we would be adding roughly 1 million more to the ranks of adults with low literacy at a time when jobs with low literacy requirements are disappearing faster than a decade ago.

Estimated Changes in population at each ALLS Prose Literacy Level

	2003		2016		Change
ALLS Prose Scale	21.4 M. adults (16-65)		23.5 M. adults (16-65)		+2.1 m
Level 4/5	4.2 M	19.5%	4.9M	21%	+0.7 M
Level 3	8.2 M	38.6%	10.6 M	45%	+2.4 M
Level 2	5.8 M	27.3%	5.6 M	24%	-0.2M
Level 1	3.1 M	14.6%	2.4M	10%	-0.7M
	9M below level 3		8 M below level 3		-1.0M*

*Potential Impact of the Committee's Goals using medium growth projections based on 2000 population estimates. CANSIM 052-0001. All projections are rounded so that the totals may not be exact.

While these goals are "stretch goals", well beyond our assumed current capacity, the Committee believes that these goals are achievable. As noted earlier, the average prose scores for the Yukon, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and Nova Scotia were not different from the average scores for Norway and Bermuda,

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the top scoring countries in the 2003 ALLS. The goals proposed here could carry us to those levels as a national average.

This table shows, using medium projections of population growth that the achievement of the Committee's goals could result in a decrease of one million people at low levels of literacy while increasing by 3.1 million the population above level 3. If these projections prove accurate, achievement of the Goals could increase the percentage of working-aged people at levels 3, 4 and 5 to 65.9% of that population from 58%. It would decrease the percentage below level 3 from 42% to about 34%.

This is a very ambitious goal. Despite the effort that achieving it would require, it would still leave 8 million people with low literacy. The solutions to Canada's literacy problems are complex and will require major investments over a very long period of time. There really is no "silver bullet".

However, there are 2.5 million people at level 2 who score between 265 and 274, just below the level three threshold of 275 points on the prose scale. Increasing the average scores of this group should be a priority. These people can be raised from level 2 to 3 with comparatively small, sustained interventions required to enhance, and then maintain, their skills. In comparison, it is estimated that it takes the equivalent of 12 grade levels to lift someone from ALLS levels 1 to 3.

This is why it will be important for a Pan-Canadian Strategy to have a mix of programs and a range of priorities on how resources will be spent. That is why the Committee is recommending an approach that "shifts the whole spectrum", paying attention to movement at all levels.

The Committee is convinced that these targets are attainable. They need to be addressed through a proper plan that better integrates efforts and results in more coherent programming. Goals also require the establishment of priorities and the targeting of specific groups of learners. Factors such as higher levels of participation in post-secondary learning and higher high school completion numbers contributed to this positive increase of 1.6 million. Another factor in favour of these goals is that a considerable number of people with low literacy are in the 55 to 64 age group and many of them will leave the labour force by 2015.

Finally, this is a compelling goal. On the first two international surveys Canada's results have been stagnant. There are 1.1 million more people with low literacy in this country now than there were in 1994. If we do nothing, projections are that we will add at least another million to the ranks of those with low literacy. We must reverse that trend and move Canada towards better performance.

THE PRINCIPLES

Building on principles widely endorsed by the literacy community during the National Literacy Action Agenda consultations in 2002-03, the Committee proposes seven Principles to inform the development of a Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy.

Adopt a Broad View of Literacy

The Committee has adopted a very inclusive view of literacy and numeracy based on both the ALLS definitions and the UNESCO approach to plural literacies. This broad view is based on the evidence that literacy affects a community and individuals socially, culturally, economically and politically. It suggests that literacy and basic education services should be available to any adult who needs them to achieve the goals they set for themselves at work, at home, and in the community. It also means that we accept the notion that literacy and learning are lifetime concerns.

Focus on the Learner

A central principle in adult education is the importance of focusing on the needs of the learner. As one Committee member expressed it: *“The learner is the most important person in a programme. He or she is the reason that it exists. The needs of the learner must be manifest in the curriculum, teacher training, learning environments and so on.”*

“Learner-centredness” means many things including, of course, the primacy of the learner in the learner-teacher relationship. It also means that the learning objectives of adults must be respected. Learners come to literacy programmes with knowledge and experience, and a learner-centred approach builds upon the knowledge and skills they already have acquired.

Learners often face barriers including those caused by learning, physical or psychological disabilities. Adult learners must also overcome barriers such as time constraints, distance, and family responsibilities. Some learners struggle with the stigma attached to low literacy and are reluctant to identify their needs. As well learners are diverse, coming from different communities and cultures in Canada. They are visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, newcomers (migrants and immigrants), those in rural and remote communities as well as youth and seniors. The diversity of these communities suggests that funding should be provided on the basis of need rather than on some dry head-count formula that does not reflect the diversity of the learner community.

They need to learn in different places (in the community, the home, the workplace, the school or college) and at different paces. As already mentioned, learners need to be encouraged, and the establishment of welcome centres or Centres d'accueil and referral services are key ingredients in getting people on the road to literacy.

The importance of this approach is best summed up in the words of a member of the Advisory Committee, Lynda Richards, who writes:

As grateful as I am for all I have learned I would also like to say there were a couple of things missing from my education that made a lot of difference in moving ahead for employment and community acceptance. Learners who grow up socially disadvantaged also need to learn acceptable language, dress, and how to act socially. It is my hope that those responsible for adult literacy programs will take a learner-centred approach and recognize the importance of including life and social skills in the curriculum.

Seek Community Solutions and Support Learning Communities

The Advisory Committee believes that progress on literacy issues requires the involvement of local communities and community-based organizations. That is why the concept of community-based action plans and the plans of Aboriginal governments should be part of the Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy.

There are many kinds of communities including, for example, communities defined by geography, language, ethnicity, culture, or faith. There are communities within housing projects, day care centres, libraries, workplaces, unions and even prisons. Literacy work needs to build on the communities of interest that are already out there and reach out to people where they have already gathered (or are most likely to gather) and where their learning will feel most comfortable and relevant.

The Committee is aware of the worldwide movement towards “learning communities”.¹⁷ The initiative began after an OECD conference on learning cities was held in Gothenberg, Sweden in 1992. In both the United Kingdom and Australia, learning community networks are active. In British Columbia, dozens of rural communities are adopting this model and both Vancouver and Victoria are developing learning city initiatives. The operational definition of learning community in use in B.C. is:

“...a village, town, city or region that is preparing for the rapidly emerging knowledge-based society by:

- *using the concept of lifelong learning as an organizing principle and social goal,*
- *mobilizing learning resources (knowledge and skills) of all five of its sectors (civic, public [health and social agencies etc.], economic, education [K to post-secondary], and voluntary), and*
- *making practical but imaginative use of learning technologies as a tool to achieve the objectives that are set and owned by the community.*¹⁸

In many learning communities throughout the world literacy is a priority. Literacy is seen as the means by which the twin objectives of social inclusion and local economic development can be achieved.¹⁹

The learning community is a comprehensive model in which representatives of all five community sectors are enabled to look through a literacy lens to promote a coherent, collaborative approach to a deeply-rooted social, cultural and economic challenge. It provides both a vision of a possible future, and an operational

¹⁷ Candy, Janet, 2005, *Town Planning for Learning Towns*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Flinders University, Adelaide. Candy estimates there are over 250 learning communities on five continents.

¹⁸ Faris, Ron, 2001, *The Way Forward: Building a Learning Nation Community by Community*, Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, Toronto. p. 3.

¹⁹ For instance, the learning City of Victoria is the centre of both a recent South Island Learning Communities Project (SILC) as well as the new provincial government LiteracyNow initiative.¹⁹ These projects include emphasis on both computer and civic literacy. Victoria City has also launched civic literacy initiatives involving youth. For example, a youth advisory body for City Council has been created, and a service-learning scheme of “citizen apprenticeship” whereby students apply academic learning to civic issues will be launched.

definition that builds on the human and social capital of the community. It recognizes that “learning-in-community”, especially to acquire the changing literacies of an emerging knowledge-based economy and society, is essentially a social process and community practice.

Create and Support Literate Environments

In addition to community action plans and learning communities/cities initiatives the Advisory Committee also is concerned about the development of “literate environments” in the home and in the workplace.

For example, support for the family as a learning environment is crucial for early-learning promotion. Studies of the interaction of parents, caregivers and their children during preschool years show that the quality and quantity of language to which children are exposed directly influences the rate of growth of a child’s vocabulary and his or her use of language structures. This research also suggests that increasing the quality of parental literacy can have beneficial long-term effects on the language development of children.²⁰

If a family thinks literacy and learning are important, then that value will influence the attitudes, choices and actions of the children. Research suggests that literate family environments make a positive difference to how well children learn in school, which can affect the path they pursue in later life.²¹

Respect Culture and Language

Governments should be committed to providing literacy services and training in the English, French, and Aboriginal languages. Wherever possible, learners should have opportunities to become literate in their mother tongue, and programming should be sensitive to the culture and realities of the learner.

As discussed earlier in this paper, the UNESCO approach to literacy is culturally sensitive. It emphasizes that literacy is not uniform. Rather, literacy is culturally and linguistically diverse. The evidence is found in the existence of different scripts or alphabets, different languages, different registers and genres, as applied to different social practices, all of which change with time and place.²²

Involve Stakeholders

This principle is designed to ensure that policies at national, provincial, and local levels are developed and implemented in consultation with literacy learners and educators, among other stakeholders. It is important as well to ensure that in the context of workforce and workplace learning employers and labour are involved.

Measure and Report on Results

As the goals proposed suggest, future international surveys of literacy and life skills can be important tools for us to use as benchmarks of performance and to

²⁰ *Ibid.*, page 62.

²¹ For a general discussion of the relationship between parental skills and those of their children see R. Haveman and B. Wolfe, *Succeeding Generations and the Effects of Investment in Children*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York, 1994.

²² *Ibid.* p. 8.

measure and assess progress against stated objectives. The importance of both quantitative assessments and qualitative measures cannot be over stated.

In addition, the impact of literacy is broad and can be measured in other ways. The impact of literacy on the political system could be measured by civic engagement using indicators such as political participation among Levels I and II; voter turnout; participation in voluntary associations ranging from political parties to faith communities and recreation associations, as examples. A second domain, which the ALLS report indicates it may focus on in the future, is the connection between literacy levels and better health outcomes like a shift from curative medicine to preventative medicine, better nutrition, and a lessening of accidental drug incidents.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES: THE ELEMENTS OF A STRATEGY

The Committee considers the following steps to be the essential elements in the development of a comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy. These are expressed as “Strategic Objectives” and are based on the Principles proposed in the previous section. They are suggested in sequence, in the general order in which they should be staged, rather than by priority.

A number of these have been developed in detail in the “Logic Model” that accompanies the National Literacy Action Plan. They are marked with an asterisk (*) and can be found in annex five.

Assemble the Essential Information

One of the key elements in the realization of these proposals is the development of an information base on the capacity to deliver literacy and essential skills programming through the workplace, community-based non-profit organizations and publicly funded institutions.

In addition we need to have a clearer picture of the variety and diversity of learners (recently settled immigrants, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, youth, seniors etc) and where they are located (rural, urban, inner-city, remote) and their proximity to programme delivery.

We also need to calculate the costs of literacy provision. This is a very complex matter and involves calculations about the cost of “per point” progress up the IALLS/ALLS scale. Time is also a factor, because learners in different circumstances with different learning styles and challenges take varying lengths of time to reach their goals.

Develop and Transfer Knowledge (Research)*

This objective is to sustain the development and transfer of a range of knowledge that is required to expand our understanding of adult and family literacy challenges, needs and solutions. Research must be clear, accessible, linked to the realities of literacy practice, and integrated into the development of future policies, programmes, curricula and delivery mechanisms.

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Close collaboration with the Knowledge Centres of the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) will be valuable since each of these Centres will be conducting research on literacy issues within their respective mandates.

Build A Quality Adult Learning System*

An Adult Learning System is made up of those places where adults can go to improve their literacy skills. These places include: classroom courses in schools and colleges; workplace sites where training is available through peer tutoring or small group instruction; community-based literacy programmes offering one-on-one tutoring or small group instruction in social service agencies, public libraries, clinics or other places; and special-needs locations like prisons or shelters for homeless people.

There is widespread agreement on the need to strengthen the capacity of the adult literacy and learning systems. The Committee goes further by saying that we need to build a Canada-wide system of high-quality adult literacy/basic education services. We have created effective K-12 and post-secondary systems. Canada also needs an adult learning system that has a strong infrastructure and sustained financial support.

Quality assurance systems in place in the United Kingdom and New Zealand under the rubric “Adult Literacy Quality Mark” are voluntary forms of quality assurance worth investigating as Canada addresses issues of quality provision.

At the same time this system has to be flexible enough to allow the provinces and territories, as well as local communities, to define their own needs and solutions. The Committee is not suggesting simply additions to what is now in place, but rather a system that builds upon and improves the provision of literacy.

An important consideration is that through experience we know that “learner self-identification” does not work. Currently much of literacy provision is based on the expectation that the learner will come to the training, rather than taking the training to the learner. Any new system would have to have an outreach component in order to be successful.

The Quebec government’s policy on adult and continuing education incorporates a number of strategies to overcome barriers to accessibility including welcoming and reference services, counseling and accompaniment services, distance learning on line, as well as special training for tutors and teachers to deal with social and learning barriers.

The system the Committee proposes should be designed to improve the quality and effectiveness of teaching through the provision of initial training, certification of literacy instructors, in-service skills upgrading and access to specialist competencies like those associated with various forms of disability. There is a need to ensure that the system has the capacity to accommodate those with physical disabilities. Attention especially has to be paid to the special curricular challenges of those who are deaf and/or blind.

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There is growing awareness that adult literacy learners should be guaranteed high quality provision. In leading nations, adult-oriented curricula and materials, and instructors trained in adult education are commonplace.

It is also important to link literacy to the development of other skills and knowledge by, for example, ensuring that there is a literacy component in apprenticeship programmes and in job-related training. This should be the case in terms of both formal and non-formal skills and knowledge development. Many trades have specialized vocabularies and those need to be taught along with the skills required to work effectively and well in those jobs.

There is a need for assessment tools to aid in the initial screening of learners and to measure their progress. These kinds of instruments should be publicly available in libraries, health centres and Service Canada Centres so that potential learners can access them securely and confidently. This is one way to reduce the stigma attached to low literacy.

Finally, the system should be results-based and should not be supported solely on the basis of “numbers served”. There has to be recognition that literacy skills are easily lost. The effort has to be long term and there has to be encouragement built into the system for people to read for life. In this regard see the suggestions on Public Awareness campaigns.

Address Barriers to Learning and Social Inclusion*

It is the case that for various reasons some Canadians are not able to, or choose not to, attend literacy training programmes. There are a number of barriers that are personal, social and economic or circumstantial. This leads directly to the conclusion that society must remove systemic barriers that prevent those with low literacy skills from contributing to and benefiting from Canada’s society and economy.

For the federal government, this means that there is a need to create a federal policy mix, based on interdepartmental cooperation, to support both social inclusion and access to learning. This suggests, for example, cooperation between departments such as Citizenship and Immigration, and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to ensure that recent arrivals to Canada have the kinds of language and literacy training they require on entry into the country to expedite their ability to join the workforce and integrate into society as rapidly as possible. There is a need to break down the barriers that exist between the delivery of English and French as second languages (ESL/FLS) and the delivery of literacy training.

There is another issue that is important in this context and that is the use of “clear language”. Not only for people with low literacy skills but indeed for the public at large, it is important that public and private institutions, as well as professions that deal directly with the public, use language that is easily understandable and free of jargon. The power of clear language is illustrated by the fact that when it became clear that not as many people as expected were applying for the Guaranteed Income Supplement, HRSDC did an analysis of its applications forms and adjusted the language in them to below IALS level three. The result was that there was a sudden increase of 70,000 additional applications.

Finally, there is the question of the growing number of people who are “alliterate” in Canada and around the world. These are people who are able to read and to write but who choose not to do so for a variety of reasons. The influences of popular culture and the increasingly pervasive use of technologies to entertain are drawing many people, especially young people, away from books, newspapers and periodicals. Their literacy skills are, as a consequence, potentially at risk. This phenomenon requires more study, but it is an issue of concern.

Provide Enhanced and Sustained Funding

The Committee is especially concerned about the lack of adequate support for sustained, predictable service delivery. This is particularly a problem for workplace and community-based provision, but it is also an issue for public institutions like colleges that typically do not get funding for academic upgrading or basic skills development programmes.

Across the country, there are concerns about the negative effects of project funding on the development of long-term sustainable literacy programmes. This has been compounded by a federal government move to contributions agreements as the way in which funding is done. For small community-based organizations, this has proven to be an administrative burden that many simply cannot carry. New ways of funding literacy programmes have to be found. Much can be learned from the U.S. Employment Zones/Enterprise Communities (EZ/EC) initiative that, since 1994, has engaged in providing 10-year funding to recipients. In Wales, 10-year funding for the “Communities First” initiative is another worthwhile example of this longer-term approach.

Finally, and most importantly, the federal government must become involved in the support of the direct provision of literacy training. There are parallels to be drawn to the support that the federal government provides for post-secondary education and for university-based research. The Committee does not see any inherent or constitutional reason why this cannot be done in the field of literacy. It is a matter of will.

There are other models of funding that could be explored as well. Sweden has a number of initiatives for adult learning. One that has worked well is the availability of study loans (or a grant that is not repayable for low income people) that is available practically without age limit (recently extended to age 60) for education. These loans (or grants) allow people to take longer courses of study, which meet the requirements of the study loan. There are also supports for shorter courses and programs such as study circles.

The advantage of this system is that it puts the money in the hands of the learner who can decide when and where they want to take courses. Therefore, providers can tailor programmes to local demand. Infrastructure adjustments are much simpler. Since the loans require proof of completion, the learners are tested prior to receiving a diploma or credential at the end of their studies. This means that the learning is results-based.

Promote Partnerships*

“Literacy happens everywhere; Literacy happens with everyone; Literacy is supported by everyone”. This simple slogan captures the reason why partnerships will be so vital to the realization of the vision for literacy and the goals that have been proposed.

The federal government has developed a strong and productive partnership model through the work of the National Literacy Secretariat. Over the years, and with NLS support, there have been valuable partnerships created to advance such issues as literacy and health, literacy and criminal justice, family literacy and workplace literacy. Partnerships with the provinces and territories are the most important strategic partnership for the federal government to establish, and the NLS has worked productively with the provinces and the territories for many years. More on these partnerships appears in the section on Federal-Provincial/Territorial Agreements or Accords.

Local governments are also important with their responsibility over community resources that are often critical to the operations of community-based literacy organizations. Libraries, at the national, provincial and local levels have also been important partners with literacy groups across Canada.

Obviously partnerships involving employers and labour are crucial for the advancement of workplace and workforce literacy. Partnerships are needed to ensure that skills are portable and that there are smooth transitions for learners between systems, both formal and non-formal. Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) will be an important aspect of collaboration of this kind as well as credit transfer and credit recognition.

Partnerships are not always easy to develop, so support is required to help organizations and groups build partnerships and sustain them. Partnerships of various kinds will be necessary. The Pan-Canadian Strategy should include a *partnership awareness and promotion programme*. The value of partnerships to advance literacy needs to be understood and the development of a variety of partnerships needs to be encouraged.

Expand Workplace Literacy

The Committee believes that the purpose of workplace literacy is to build the capacity of workers in Canada. The workplace is an important venue for learning especially for those who have little time for learning outside of the workplace because of personal and family commitments, or for those who do not have the resources to travel beyond the basic requirement of getting to work.

To be successful, workplace learning must be centred on the needs of workers in their various roles at work, at home, in the union and in the community. A worker-centred approach means addressing the needs of the worker as a whole person, because workers have many roles in life within and beyond the workplace. It means developing the kind of learning experiences that will empower participants in workplace programs to have more control over their lives and their jobs. One effective technique that has been used in the United Kingdom, Germany and Sweden is to have a designated person, a union representative as in the case of

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the U.K., to act as “Learning Advocates” for employees to ensure that their training needs are identified and met.

The federal government needs to co-ordinate with the provinces and fund a system in the workplace to promote, deliver and support adult learning (including literacy, English and French as a Second Languages [ESL/FSL], basic skills development, high school completion or its equivalent) with conditions for equity and quality.

The strategy should include: joint governance at provincial and workplace levels, paid time to learn and support for all aspects of the delivery of relevant, worker-centred programming, and the strategy must be based on a strong foundation within a high-quality, well-resourced public education system at every level and include not-for profit community-based and union-based learning organizations.

Specific mechanisms for implementation suggested for consideration include a training levy along the lines of “La loi 90” in Quebec. The objective of the law is to improve the quality of the labour force to promote employment, the abilities to find a job and adapt to the workplace, and the increased mobility of workers. Any firm with a salary base of over \$1M must invest a minimum of 1% of its salary base in the training of its personnel and to declare that amount invested to the Ministry of Revenue. Any funds not invested during a calendar year must be transferred to the National Fund for Manpower Training.

Companies that do not have a salary base of \$1M are able to get annual grants for projects related to the training of their workers from this National Fund. The Fund’s priorities are basic training in literacy, numeracy and essential skills, Francisation, the acquisition of skills required for new workplace requirements, and training in the management of training.

Many employers across Canada voluntarily invest far beyond the 1% mandated under the Quebec law. For example, the manufacturing sector invests on average 2.5% in workplace training. The Committee suggests that the federal government encourage employers to invest a minimum of 1% of payroll on workplace training using appropriate means.

Potential other tools are “Training Insurance” using EI Part I funding and “work-share while learning” programmes. Another option would be the introduction of literacy and essential skills training as an element of employee benefit and supports measures for EI recipients. Training leave entitlements under the Canada Labour Code should also be considered.

Enhance Family Literacy

There is a growing body of research that concludes that literacy development begins at birth, and is shaped by a child’s experiences in the first years of life. Children are born into a world of language. They are immersed in the words of their parents, their siblings, and those who care for them. Their speech emerges gradually and naturally as they learn to respond to the people around them. Most children speak their first clear words sometime during their second year of life.

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Their vocabularies then grow very quickly. Lives of literacy begin in a family setting.²³

In addition to the focus on children, there is an intergenerational dimension to family literacy that encompasses family members at every age from childhood to adolescence, youth, adulthood and old age. Family literacy programmes provide parents and caregivers the knowledge they need to understand how literacy develops. These programmes also impart the skills required to provide a richer learning environment for children. Programmes also teach early parenting strategies, present opportunities for adults to increase their literacy skills, and provide support for parents to assist in their children's schooling. It is also generally accepted that family literacy programmes will involve the parent or caregiver directly and the children either directly or indirectly.

Successful family literacy programmes build on the strengths of families. Programmes that are linked to everyday activities and that go beyond reading and writing activities appear to be the most successful. Barriers to family literacy programmes are found in issues such as a lack of childcare assistance, transportation costs, scheduling conflicts and accessibility problems. That is why these programmes generally require wraparound supports (childcare, transportation, healthy snacks) and income supports.

There is a wide variety of family literacy programmes currently in use in Canada. With the appropriate resources, it is possible to adapt programmes to meet the needs of almost every individual and group. Most programmes are between 10 and 25 hours in duration, but a few are more intensive. The more intensive programmes can focus, for example, on the literacy needs of the adult learner. Most programmes target parents/caregivers of pre-school children, but there is increased interest in providing specialized programmes that target parents/caregivers of children and youth who are in school.

The ways that literacy is used in the home and the extent to which it is used are affected by many social and cultural factors. Parents and caregivers either consciously provide opportunities that support their family's literacy development, or these things happen spontaneously. Often literacy activities take place in the home, but parents may need support in providing bridging activities that prepare their children for school.

Parents who participate in family literacy programs are more likely:

- To participate in other types of adult literacy programs.
- Have changed attitudes about education.
- See their literacy levels increase.
- Improve their knowledge of parenting options and child development so they become better able to enhance their children's positive learning environment.
- Enjoy greater employment status and job satisfaction.

Families who participate in family literacy programs:

²³ Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society*, Ottawa and Paris, 1997, pages 61 and 62.

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- Tend to get more involved in schools, which leads to better achievement for the children.
- Families bond in different ways, become emotionally closer and engage in more literate behaviours.

Family literacy benefits society because it:

- Provides support for children and youth to succeed in school thus helping to break the cycle of educational disadvantage.
- Has a positive impact on the economic status of families, which in turn, contributes to better nutrition and improved health.
- Prepares parents and children to meet the challenges of a competing global marketplace.
- Contributes to the development of a literate society.

A comprehensive family literacy strategy can be built on five strategic axes that are features of the Committee's approach: policy development, research, programme delivery, training, awareness raising and promotion.

Increase Public Awareness

The Committee believes that efforts to raise public awareness of the literacy challenges that Canada faces will be important. Equally important will be the promotion of the Vision for literacy contained in this document and a broadly based understanding of our national literacy goals for the period 2006-2016.

The Committee thinks that an effective campaign will have to be multi-faceted with a number of target audiences. The Committee is convinced that campaigns should stress the positive contribution literacy can make to communities, families and individuals by building on the strengths of Canadians. Rather than a war on illiteracy, we want to promote the positive benefits that flow of acquiring and using literacy skills.

During the consultations that the Minister of State held there were frequent calls for a "ParticipAction" style campaign to encourage people to be readers, to read to their children, to use their local libraries, and to read for pleasure. The important point is that literacy skills, once acquired, need to be used or they can be lost. In Canada, the loss of literacy with age is quite pronounced compared to other countries so we need to encourage activities related to literacy and numeracy. The Committee wants Canadians to be "Readers for Life".

Develop Provincial and Territorial Partnership Accords

All of the stakeholders have recommended that Canada's literacy challenges can only be addressed if the federal, provincial and territorial governments work collaboratively in an open partnership that engages other sectors of society.

To assist in this process, the Advisory Committee proposes the development of Federal-Provincial/Territorial Literacy Accords. To be effective the Committee suggests that these Accords have certain characteristics. They are as follows in order of priority:

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- The federal government, through these Accords, must invest in the direct delivery of literacy programmes in partnership with the provinces and territories.
- Accords should be negotiated with each province and territory in order to ensure that the literacy needs of each jurisdiction can be fully accommodated.
- The Accords must be respectful of the literacy policies and programmes already in place in each provincial or territorial jurisdiction. Since the Pan-Canadian Strategy should be able to accommodate provincial and territorial system differences, the Accords will have to be written with that kind of partnership in mind.
- The Principles outlined in this document should be an integral part of these Accords.
- Specific provincial or territorial literacy goals drawn from the Pan-Canadian Goals recommended by the Committee should be an element of each Accord.
- The Accords should have clear benchmarks, indicators and reporting mechanisms included in them to account for the expenditures of money and to monitor progress towards the 10-year goals. The Committee recommends that reporting be done on three-year intervals.
- The Accords should contain provisions for the expansion of systems for delivery where they exist and creation of capacity where required to meet the goals established.
- The Accords should provide for the infrastructure required to coordinate programmes, train trainers, develop appropriate curriculum, and provide in-service training.
- The Accords should provide core, stable and sustainable funding for long-term delivery if the goals for literacy are to be met. Short-term project funding has proven to be inadequate in supporting current literacy delivery.
- Funding arrangements negotiated within the Accords should be based on demonstrated need supported by research and data collection on a regular basis.
- The Accords should be designed to encourage horizontality across all levels of government so that the literacy issues of Aboriginal peoples, immigrants, equity groups, disabled persons, youth, seniors and other target groups can be met holistically and without conflicts between jurisdictions and programmes.
- The Accords should be designed to encourage and support the development of community-based or locally-based literacy action plans and community activities (such as the learning communities and learning cities initiatives) that support the development to literate environments in families, communities and workplaces.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This Report prepared by the Advisory Committee to the Minister of State for Human Resources Development has explained the origins of the call for a comprehensive Pan-Canadian Strategy, the Government's response to that recommendation, the importance of literacy to the Government's agenda, the results of three sets of consultations on the future of literacy, and provided an initial review of the results of the 2005 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey and compared them to Canada's results from the IALS study a decade earlier.

Based on this information, the Committee has prepared a Vision Statement to express what Canada should strive for as a Society through the development of a comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy. Because it is a Vision Statement setting a broad direction, the Committee has also articulated and explained a set of Goals for literacy in Canada over the next ten years. These should be incorporated into the Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy as the initial phase designed to realize of the Vision.

Next, the Committee has provided a statement of seven key principles upon which the Strategy should be based. Then, finally, the Committee provides a statement of "Strategic Outcomes. It lays out 10 actions to make the Strategy operational. Taken together, this is the Committee's recommended plan for a Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy. Achievement of those goals will set Canada firmly on the path to the central objective of the vision statement by moving the country "Towards a Fully Literate Canada".

The Committee therefore recommends:

1. That the Government of Canada adopts the vision statement proposed by this Committee as the long-term strategic direction for a comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy.
2. That the federal government articulates a set of measurable and attainable goals as the initial ten-year objectives for the comprehensive Pan Canadian Literacy Strategy and that the government consider using the goals proposed by this Advisory Committee.
3. That a set of Principles be adopted to inform the development of the policy, design and implementation of the comprehensive Pan-Canadian Strategy. Principles such as "A Focus on the Learner" are essential.
4. That the federal government negotiates bilateral "Literacy Accords" with each of the Provinces and Territories based on the full set of characteristics outlined in this paper.
5. That the federal government strengthen and expand the role of the National Literacy Secretariat to act as its agent in the negotiation and implementation of these Accords and that this expanded Secretariat be given responsibility to ensure that there is horizontal policy and programme coordination across the federal government. The NLS should be given responsibility to monitor "clear language" use across government.
6. That the federal government model the literacy principles and practices which it promotes by requiring departments and agencies to use clear language in

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their communications with the public; that the government require the use a “literacy policy lens” in policy making across the federal system; that it strengthen the provision of literacy in the prisons and in First Nation’s schools; and that it provide literacy and essential skills training to federal government employees who need to upgrade their skills.

7. That the Federal Government, through these Accords and other appropriate mechanisms, invest in the direct delivery of literacy programmes.
8. That through these Accords the Federal Government works with the Provinces and Territories on the establishment of a coherent national Adult Learning System.
9. That the Accords should provide core, stable and sustainable funding for long-term literacy programme delivery to meet the goals for literacy mentioned above.
10. The Accords should be designed to encourage and support the development of community based and locally based literacy action plans as well as community activities (such as the learning communities and learning cities initiatives) that encourage the development of literate environments in families, communities and workplaces.
11. That the Accords with the Provinces and Territories should be designed to encourage horizontality across all levels of government so that the literacy issues of Aboriginal peoples, immigrants, equity groups, Official Languages minorities, disabled persons, youth, seniors and other target groups can be met holistically and without conflicts between jurisdictions and programmes.
12. That the literacy and language training needs of immigrants to Canada should be a high priority in the development and implementation of the comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy. Immigrants need to be provided with training in an official language on arrival in Canada to ensure that they can use the skills they already have to the benefit of the economy and to foster their integration into society. Resources must be allocated to support the ongoing literacy and language training needs of immigrants throughout the settlement process.
13. That the Government of Canada recommend to Parliament the creation of a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills to monitor our nation’s progress towards its literacy goals and to provide Parliamentarians with a mechanism to report to the public on progress.
14. That the Government of Canada appoint a Minister Responsible for Literacy and Essential Skills as an on going Cabinet position.
15. That the Minister Responsible for Literacy appoint a Pan-Canadian Literacy Advisory Committee to assist in the realization of the Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy with the resources and capacities it needs to do research, monitor progress, and engage new partners as required.

Advisory Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ACRONYMS

- ALLS:** **The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey.** On May 11th 2005, the results from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) were released. This report presents an initial set of findings covering Canada, Bermuda, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, the United States and the Mexican State of Nuevo Leon.
- FAS/FAE** **Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effect**
- HRSDC** **Human Resources and Skills Development Canada**
- IALS** **The International Adult Literacy Survey** carried out between 1994 and 1998 involving 20 countries. The first report, *Literacy, Economy and Society: Results of the First International Literacy Survey*, had data on Canada, Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland and the United States. Additional estimates for Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland appear in *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society: Further Results of the International Adult Literacy Survey*. Eleven additional countries were included in *Literacy for the Information Age: Final Results of the International Adult Literacy Survey*. A separate report on IALS data for Canada was published in *Reading the Future: A Portrait of Literacy in Canada*.
- IALLS** **The International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey** is the Canadian component of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) carried out in 2003.
- Literacy and Essential Skills:** For the purposes of this Report “literacy and essential skills” include reading text, writing, numeracy and document use as well as oral communication, working with others, thinking skills, computer use and continuous learning.
- OECD** **The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development**
- UNESCO** **The United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization**

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