

communities with implications for community-based responses, and they include reports from each industrial sector on what can be done by firms, associations and governments to build competitiveness.

As a result, at no time in the past have we ever been so well prepared to tackle the economic challenges that face us.

A key part of the initiative was the work of the Steering Group, led by Marie-Josée Drouin and David McCamus, which operated independently, at arm's length from the federal government, and with twenty volunteer members representing a broad cross-section of Canadian society.

The Steering Group's Action Plan highlights something I have been saying for a long time, namely that the federal government alone cannot ensure our future economic and social well-being. The Plan should help all of us work together: first, to create opportunities by building an innovative society; second, to create a learning culture; finally, to create a more inclusive society.

The focus on creating opportunities by building an innovative society includes:

- increasing the use of science, and the development of technology to bring new products from the lab to the market,
- expanding financing opportunities to support the creation of a more entrepreneurial economy;
- building a strong domestic market in Canada from which we can take on the world, and
- trading smarter in new and traditional markets to capture a larger share of global trade, investment and technology flows.

The plan reflects the Steering Group's conviction that the keys to achieving these goals are innovation and quality management practices, in both the private and public sectors, combined with technological mastery and growing productivity. The plan recommends specific actions that focus on customer needs and on making Canada a leader in quality. It also recommends actions to improve consumer education.

Improving our education and training systems and building a new learning culture for Canada form the second element of the action plan. This part focuses on developing results- and competence-based systems, promotion of innovation, and partnerships for excellence in learning. The plan focuses on ensuring that Canadians become aware of the value of learning and have access to a lifetime of learning opportunities.