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Relation between the educational system and the labour market

Employment and Immigration Minister Bud Cullen, addressing a joint meeting of provincial ministers of education and manpower in Victoria, British Columbia last month, described how his department, in co-operation with the provinces, was helping students prepare to enter the work force. Passages from his speech follow:

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We in Canada are not alone in our concern for the relationship between the educational system and the labour market. At the High-Level Conference on Youth Unemployment sponsored by the OECD in Paris last month, one of the central concerns of member countries was the school-to-work transition. We are one of the few OECD members, however, in which the achievement of this objective is complicated by our federal constitutional structure. I view this as a challenge to be even more innovative and imaginative in our efforts to help young people obtain stable and rewarding employment.

While the present economic situation is responsible in some measure for the current high level of unemployment rates in general, the widening gap between adult rates (now about 6 per cent) and youth rates (now about 15 per cent) indicates that other fundamental structural factors are at work. Superimposed on these difficulties, as many of you are painfully aware, are the extensive geographical economic and employment disparities which characterize Canada, and result in a particularly critical youth unemployment situation in many areas. Some recent experience suggests that this can lead to serious apathy or indeed an indiscriminating antipathy to existing social values and institutions.

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...There is disturbing evidence that expectations concerning the role of education in preparing young people for the labour market vary considerably. These differences are perhaps most dramatically highlighted in a recent survey conducted in one province among 3,000 high school

students, teachers and parents. Asked to list what they considered to be the school's most important goals, the students ranked the abilities and skills needed for employment as third on their list, while the teachers relegated these to thirty-eighth position.

Co-operative education projects

There are a number of innovations that can and should be introduced to improve this situation. One is to arrange for students to get some practical experience in the world of work as part of their school program. We have evidence of a few very good co-operative education programs at the post-secondary level, but we need many more. I am keen to promote experiments in activities of this sort, and we are currently offering funds for pilot projects in this area. But co-operative education programs take a great deal of planning, federal-provincial collaboration, and hard work to arrange. I hope that further consultations with your governments on this matter may lead to productive applications for even more co-operative education projects.

A second key response to the perennial problem of the young worker who cannot get a job without relevant private sector experience is the Job Experience Training Program or "JET". Under this program, which is operated by boards of trade and chambers of commerce, the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission subsidizes the wages of young school-leavers. Employers agree to hire these youths for up to 26 weeks between October and March with the possibility that they may be retained permanently if all works well. In addition, my colleague the Minister of



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